

INDIAN TALES

OF
FUN, FOLLY and FOLKLORE

A COLLECTION OF THE
TALES OF TENNALI RAMAN
TALES OF MARIADA RAMAN
TALES OF RAJA BIRBAL
KOMATI WIT AND WISDOM
THE SON-IN-LAW ABROAD
NEW INDIAN TALES
TALES OF RAYA AND APPAJI
FOLK-LORE OF THE TELUGUS

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THE INDIAN REVIEW

*A High Class Monthly Magazine devoted
to the discussion of all topics of interest*

EDITED BY MR. G. A. NATESAN

The *Indian Review* is the Bayman's monthly. It appeals equally to the wealthy and the cultured. Its list of contributors includes many well known writers in England and India, and Specialists in arts and sciences, Politicians, Public Servants, Lawyers, Doctors, Professors, Businessmen, Journalists—all contribute to its interesting pages. Send an M.O. for 1s. Five a year's subscription, and enrol yourself as an annual subscriber.

INTRODUCTION

EVERY nation, whether ancient or modern, has had and continues to have, its own peculiar wit and humour. Aesop's Fables, which were written 600 years before Christ, are, perhaps, the earliest existing examples of witty stories of the West intended to instruct mankind. Side by side with these fables, similar stories have existed in India for imparting education. These, after undergoing great alterations, have been handed down to the present day in the *Panchatantra*, *Hitopadesa* and *Kathasaritsagara*. In the sixth century A D, the celebrated Sassanian King, Nashirvan, had these tales translated into Pehlavi and the Western nations copied these tales. This goes far to prove that India was the home of wit and humour.

But India is the home of every variety of thought and life, and there is no doubt that the Tamils and the Telugus of South India and the Moghuls of Upper India have cultivated distinctive types of culture despite their fundamental unity. One can easily distinguish the peculiar flavour of Komati wit from the audacious jesting of Tennahraman. "The Son-in-Law Abroad" is a typical South Indian product and it would be an amusing study to compare him with the Deccan or the Bengal variety and "judge who is the better fool." The genius of Raja Birbal and the anecdotes of Appaji are the peculiar products of court life and their stories afford an amusing and instructive study in diplomacy of a kind. The folk-lore of the Telugus and the New Indian Tales offer much entertainment. But for sheer instinct for detection and subtle handling of complicated cases, Mariada

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TALES OF TENNALIRAMA

BY

PANDIT S M NATESA SASTRI, B A

[The Tales of Tennaiirama are as popular in Southern India as the fables of *Aesop* in the West. Tennaiirama was a celebrated wit who flourished, according to popular legends, during the time of the Vijayanagara King, Krishnadeva Raya, well known for his piety and learning and famous as the builder of the "Thousand pillar Mandapas" in many a temple from Conjeeveram to Cape Comorin. It was the fashion in those days for every monarch or chief to keep a court jester who sometime played the part of a modern poet laureate. Tennaiiraman was supposed to have composed some Telugu verses but his popularity was mainly due to his jests. A Tamil book called "Tennaiiraman Kathai" contains a collection of nineteen stories regarding him. Some of these are omitted as being too vulgar for cultivated tastes. Not all the rest are up to the mark, but they are suggestive of the popular taste of his time and for that reason, interesting]

I

BECOMING A PROFESSIONAL JESTER

IN the Telugu country there is a village named Tennali. In it was born a Brahman boy named Rama. Once, a *Sanyasi** met this boy in the street, and, struck with his handsome appearance and his ready wit, taught him a certain incantation and said—"My dear fellow, if you, in the course of a single night, repeatedly chant this incantation in the presence of the goddess Kali, she will appear before you with her thousand faces. If you be not overcome with fear of her presence, you can secure from her

* A religious mendicant

whatever boon you may desire"; From that day, Rama was waiting for an auspicious occasion to go to the Kali temple near his village. Duly as the time came, he stood before the goddess and repeated the incantations, Kali appeared before him with her thousand faces. The little fellow, however, was not at all afraid, but laughed at the goddess. Whereupon, Kali asked him in a stern voice, 'Why do you laugh?' And Rama replied—"Mother, we, men, have each but one nose and two hands, yet when we contract a head-cold, we find it very difficult to blow our nose with our two hands. If ever you, who have thousand noses, should suffer from cold, I wonder how little your two hands will avail you!" Pleased at the lad's wit, the goddess said, "Ah boy! inasmuch as you have jested with me, you shall, from this day, become a jester—*Vikatalau*." And the boy said readily, "Mighty goddess, you have given me a very fine boon. If I read my title from right to left I am a jester, and if from left to right, I am a jester, still." The goddess was all the more pleased at this and said —

"For your intelligence you shall be a court-jester and all in the king's assembly shall ever praise you for your wit." After having said so, the goddess vanished. Rama, after that day, attained more and more celebrity as a jester, and at last reached the court of *Rayar*[†] and continued to live there.

* The Tamil word for jester reads the same from left to right or from right to left, like the English word *level*.

† The *Payar*. King Krishnadeva Raya of the Vijayanagar family, who reigned about the beginning of the 16th century A.D. at Hampi.

II

ESCAPING FROM THE PUNISHMENT OF BEING
TRAMPLED BY AN ELEPHANT

ONE day, Tennalirama incurred the extreme displeasure of the *Rayar* by overdoing his part as a jester. The *Rayar* was much enraged and condemned Tennalirama to be trampled on by an elephant. The servants of the palace took him to an open plain outside the city, dug a deep pit and buried him in it, leaving only his face above ground. They then returned to the city to fetch an elephant to trample on the criminal's head. In the interval, a hump-backed washerman happened to pass that way, and he asked the jester "Why, sir, do you stand thus buried?" Tennalirama replied — "I have had a bad hump-back for a very long time. To make my body straight, a physician left me buried here thus. I have lost my curve and become straight now. You can dig me up and see for yourself whether it is so or not." The washerman dug him up, and not seeing any bend on the jester's body, begged to be buried in the pit, so that his body might become erect too. Tennalirama was not slow to comply with this request, and returned to the *Rayar* with the washerman's bundle. The *Rayar* asked — "How now! Tennalirama here! Did I not order you to be trampled on to death?" The jester replied with a cool obeisance — "So it was ordered, but an honest washerman has obligingly taken my place, and left this bundle in my keeping." He then explained how he was able to escape from the pit. The *Rayar* laughed heartily and excused his jester.

III

ESCAPING FROM THE PUNISHMENT OF BEING
CUT OFF BY THE SWORD

ANOTHER day, Tennalirama committed a serious blunder in jesting, and the *Raya* was much enraged. He sent for two soldiers, and making over the jester to them, he said "Here! take this knave out of our presence and cut off his head with your swords." The soldiers carried him off accordingly, and as they were preparing for their cruel act, he spoke gently to them — "Anyhow you are to cut off my head. For the good of my soul, however, in the other world, allow me to go to yonder tank, stand neck-deep in the water and in that position, contemplate on God for one *muhurta* while you both watch me with drawn swords each on one side. When my contemplation is over, each will take aim at the same instant, and cut off my head with one full sweep of his sword." They agreed to do so and he went and stood thus in the tank, and when the swords were being aimed at him from both sides, he suddenly went down into the water, and the sword of the each soldier cut off the head of the other. Without losing much time, Tennalirama stood in the presence of the *Raya* and, to his astonished queries, only offered this brief explanation "The clumsy fellows' they killed each other, and let me escape"

IV

HOW THE SENTRIES WERE WHIPPED

ONCE there came to the *Raya*'s court certain Bhagavata dancers from the Telugu country. The *Raya* ordered a dance in the palace and gave orders to the sentries at the two gates not to let in Tennalirama. When the dance was going on inside, Tennalirama went to the first sentry and said "Allow me to go in. I shall give you half of what I get." He allowed him to go in. And he said the same to the second sentry and thus went in. Then, taking out a churn-dasher, which he had brought with him concealed, he struck the dancer who was playing the part of God Krishna. The actor set up a cry of pain—"Ayo!" And Tennalirama remarked "Fie! Is this man Krishna? He is said to have received several blows from the churn-dashers of many herd-maids. But how is it that he is not able to bear one single blow from my dasher?" On seeing him, the *Raya* said "How did he come in? Give him 24 stripes with a whip." When the jester was being led out to receive the stripes, he asked the second sentry, "Have you not consented to receive half of what I get?" And he said, "True, I have." "I am to be given 24 stripes, and half of it—12 stripes—you shall have." Thus saying, he had the second sentry whipped, and also saw that the first sentry received the other 12, himself escaping unhurt.

* A set of religious people who sing and dance and enact the scenes of Krishna's life as depicted in the *Bhagavata*. This institution has gone out of vogue now, and has been replaced by what are called *Kalakshepas*, in which some religious story is expounded to the devout listeners with singing and sometimes dancing.

V

A NOVEL MODE OF PAINTING

THE *Rayar* built a storied house in a beautiful style. He then sent for a painter and ordered him to paint suitable pictures on the walls of the mansion. After finishing his work, the painter intimated the fact to the *Rayar*. The *Rayar* proceeded to the house accompanied by his ministers and others, and as he was being shown the several pictures, Tennalirama noticed a picture which was painted in profile. And he asked "Great King! This picture displays the limbs of only one side. Where are those of the other side?" To this the *Rayar* said "You must imagine it all. Don't you know this?" And as he said so, he laughed. "Yes, I understand it now", said Tennalirama in apparent sincerity. Sometimes, after Tennalirama said to the *Rayar* one day "From the day we visited your new mansion, I have been practising painting. I have become an expert painter. You must witness my beautiful pictures now." "Indeed!" said the *Rayar* and as the paintings in his palace had become old, he added "You can then rub away all these old paintings and execute new ones in their places." He then gave him betel leaf and nuts for the work, vacated that house, and removed to another building. Tennalirama then rubbed away all the beautiful paintings on the wall. He painted a nail in one place, a finger in another place, a hand in a third. Thus, in his own way, he filled the whole house with drabs and spoiled its beauty utterly. He then went to the *Rayar* and said "I have finished my paintings. Kindly favour me with a visit." The *Rayar*, taking him seriously, entered

* Hindu method of closing a bargain or contract

the building accompanied by several people. On seeing the pictures, he said "What! Tennalirama! I see only odd limbs and fragments" Tenhalirama said "You must imagine all the other portions to exist on the other side What! have you forgotten that obvious thing?" The *Rajar* exclaimed, "O! I have been deceived You have spoiled the whole building" He was much ashamed and returned to his palace in anger.

VI

PROFITING BY THE LABOUR OF THIEVES

ONE night, Tennalirama came to know that six thieves had concealed themselves near his house and that they were only waiting for an opportunity to enter in and take away his things. He soon went into the several rooms and safely secured all the money, jewels, and silk clothes. He then called out to his wife and said loud enough for the thieves to hear. As there is now much fear of thieves in this city, we shall keep all our property in a big box and lock it safely. Then he filled up a big box with stones and block. He himself, his wife and his son, all the three, carried the box to a well which was in a garden outside the house and threw it into the well with a heavy splash. The thieves, who had carefully observed all this and were thoroughly taken in, said to themselves: "It is not necessary for us now to get into the house. We shall descend into the well and carry away the box. How easy they have made it for us!" And with great eagerness, one of them descended into the well, but on examining,

found the water very deep, and said that if some of the water was baled out, they could easily take up the box. They all agreed to it. They divided themselves into two parties of three each, and went to work with the object of draining the well. And Tennalirama entered the garden unobserved and went on opening and closing the channels which conveyed the water to the several patches of land in which plantain, areca-nut, lime, orange, citron, cocoa-nut and other trees were planted, and saw to the proper distribution of the water. As there was plenty of water in the well, the thieves went on baling out water throughout the night. When the day was about to dawn, Tennalirama cried aloud "The whole garden has been well watered. You may leave off the buckets now." On hearing it, the thieves ran away, glad to be let off so easily.

VII

REARING A COLT

THE *Rayan* got a supply of colts and distributed them all in his town at the rate of one colt for each house. He also ordered that every one who got a colt should receive three pagodas monthly for grass, gram and drugs for bringing up the colt. Thus every one received a colt and began to bring up the animal excellently. Tennalirama alone raised a small room shut up on all sides. He left the colt at large in that room and opened a gap in the wall just opposite to its face, and, inside the room, he dug up a small pit. Every morning he went near this room with a handful of grass and fed the animal through the

slit by his own hands, and he poured a little water in the pit inside the room himself. He did this in the evening also. In this way, he converted the three pagodas, which he received monthly for rearing the colt, to his own use.

After three years, the *Rayar* ordered all the townsfolk to bring and exhibit their colts. They brought their colts as ordered. All the colts were fat and fleshy with shiny hair—some skipping, some dancing and some jumping and running. Tennalirama alone did not bring his colt. The *Rayar* called him and asked "Why have you not brought your animal?" And he replied "No one can approach and catch hold of my colt. If you will give me the help of the best of the Muhammadans under you, I shall go and fetch my colt." And the *Rayar* gave him the desired help. The Muhammadan chosen for this duty had a slender beard one cubit long. The jester took him to where the colt was and asked him to look at it through the gap. The Muhammadan did so, thrusting his face in the gap. The colt thought that grass was being offered to it, and, bounding suddenly, caught hold of the Muhammadan's beard.

The Muhammadan began to cry aloud "Allah! Allah!" Tennalirama ran to the *Rayar* at once and said "The colt has caught hold of your Muhammadan and will not leave him off. The poor man is crying piteously." The *Rayar* went to the spot and saw how the colt had caught hold of the Muhammadan's beard, and how the poor man struggled with pain. When the wall was pulled down, the beard was easily released, but what was the *Rayar's* astonishment to see that the colt that had caused so much trouble was scarcely able to stand on its legs! It was plain that Tennalirama had not been feeding the animal properly, and

the *Rayar* demanded sternly which way the monthly allowance had gone. But Tennalirama knew how to answer readily, "You see how unmanageable the colt is, even when so sparingly fed your strongest Muhammadan is unable to control it. If it should be well fed, I wonder whom you can find to keep and drive it." The audacity of the answer astonished the *Rayar* out of his anger, and he and the others laughed till they nearly split their sides.

VIII

PEARING A KITTEN

THE *Rayar* gave to each householder in his town a kitten and a cow, and ordered that the kitten should be reared on the milk of the cow. Like others, Tennalirama received a cow and a kitten. All the householders milked their cows and gave the whole yield to their kittens. But Tennalirama, on the very first day, milked his cow and placed it boiling hot near the kitten. It eagerly lapped the milk and was scalded. From that day forward, all the kitten used to run away the moment it saw all the milk. Tennalirama then consumed the entire milk of the cow which had been intended for the kitten. After some days, the *Rayar* ordered all the kittens to be brought that he might see them. And of all the kittens, Tennalirama's alone was very lean. It appeared to be almost dying. "How is it that this kitten is so lean?" asked the *Rayar*. "It runs away at sight of milk, what can I do?" said Tennalirama. The *Rayar* at once ordered some milk to be offered to it in his presence. And when it saw the milk, it

became afraid and ran away. The *Raya*i ordered it to be caught, and on examining it, he saw that its tongue had been scalded. But he was pleased with the joke, and laughed as he said: "There is a proverb which says that the scalded cat never approaches even cold water. Even so, you have once placed hot milk before it and made it dread the very sight of milk."

IX

A GREAT DOCTOR OF SCIENCES OVERTHROWN

ONE day a learned man named *Vidyasagara*,* versed in several sciences, came to the court of the *Raya*i. The learned men in the *Raya*i's court grew anxious about their future position in the court, and spoke to Tennaiirama: "There is a vast difference between his proficiency and our proficiency. If he conquers us in debate, it will be a great shame to all of us, and the *Raya*i will then send us away. What shall we do?" Tennaiirama said: "You need not fear. I shall contrive some means to foil him."

Then, on a certain day, that learned man—*Vidyasagara*—came to *Raya*i's court for a disputation. Tennaiirama had previously made up a bundle of the dried twigs of the sesamum plant arranged in the shape of a palm-leaf book, and he had tied this book with the rope which is generally used in tethering buffaloes. This volume he had tied up in a piece of cloth. With this bundle, he came and sat before the

* The ocean of knowledge.

great doctor of all sciences On seeing the (supposed) volume, the doctor asked "What is the name of this book?" And Tennalirama said "this is the book named *Sesamum-twig-dried-buffalo-bandage* On hearing it, the doctor was much perplexed and thought to himself "What! after having mastered so many sciences, it is a wonder that I have not even heard of the name of this book" While he was thus lost in thinking, Tennalirama asked the pandit "You bear the reputation of being well versed in all the sciences Have you never come across this great science?" To this he replied "I shall answer you to-morrow", and went away to the house where he was temporarily staying He considered the matter long and anxiously, and, at last, came to a decision "I am not able to understand even the title of the book How, then, can I know the subjects treated of in it? I must needs incur shame if I continue to stay here" So arguing, he ran away from the place in the morning long before the day dawned And when the *Rayar* heard that the great doctor of all sciences had decamped even without taking formal leave of him, he sent for Tennalirama and asked him how he had put that great doctor to flight The jester said By means of this book—*Sesamum-twig-dried-buffalo bandage*

"Untie the book," said the *Rayar* He did so And when the *Rayar* saw that dried sesamum twigs were tied up by the rope used for tying up buffaloes, he understood the meaning of the several words and laughed saying "I see, it was by a combination of these words that you contrived to send away the pandit"

X

A WRESTLER DECEIVED

THERE was a wrestler named Atis'ura. He had conquered the wrestlers of various courts and came to the kingdom of the *Raya* with many badges of honour. All the wrestlers in the kingdom of the *Raya* took alarm and were in a fix. Tennalirama saw this and asked them why they were so dispirited. They said "Up to this time we have been living under this Maharaja with respect. Now the time has come for us when we shall lose our position and even our means of livelihood. A wrestler has come to reduce us to this position. What shall we do?" Tennalirama said "Have no fear. Give me all your badges and follow me as your chief." He then put on all the badges, and assuming the name of Virakesari,† took up his position with his followers in a tent opposite to that of Atis'ura. That wrestler thought within himself "This chief seems to be a formidable rival. Let me first of all know my man. So he sent word to Virakesari that he had come to see" him. And Tennalirama sent back the following message "You need not come here now. You can make known your business in the *Raya*'s presence to-morrow." Atis'ura, on hearing this, was much shaken, thinking "What sort of a wrestler may he be?" Next day, the *Raya* permitted Atis'ura and Virakesari to wrestle in his presence. Then Virakesari asked Atis'ura "Is your method of wrestling the scientific method or the physical-force method?" Atis'ura replied "It is the scientific method." And then Virakesari said.

* Atis'ura = the most valorous

† Lion in valour.

"I shall show you some signs of the scientific method of wrestling. If you explain what those signs mean, I shall deem it proper to wrestle with you." Atis'ura said. Let it be so." Thereupon, Virakésari joined together the three fingers of Atis'ura's hand, and hit his own chest with them, placed his adversary's palms extended on his own shoulders, described a circle round his neck † with the front finger, showed his right palm hanging upside down up to the hip, ‡ and waved his left fist §. The wrestler saw these signs but could make nothing of them. He thought over all the signs that he had learnt in wrestling, but in vain. Having waited for some time, Tennalirama snatched from him all the badges which he had acquired in other places and, beating his victorious drum, entered his tent. The next day, the *Raya* asked "Tennalirama! What is the meaning of those signs which you displayed yesterday?" And Tennalirama, showing those signs again, explained "Atis'ura! If I approach you, you will pierce me with your dagger in my chest* and kill me. I shall then drop down stretched on the ground with my face upwards. Then who will protect my wife and child"|| On hearing this, the *Raya* laughed heartily.

† Describing a circle round the neck means a wife in the language of the deaf and dumb among the Hindus, as a woman becomes wife by the marriage badge or *tali* being tied by the husband round her neck.

‡ The symbol of the right palm suspended up to the hip indicates *child* by the height from the ground.

§ Waving the left fist is questioning.

* This was what the jester meant when he joined together the three fingers of Atis'ura's hand and directed them against his own chest.

|| This was what Tennalirama indicated when he brought on his own shoulders the extended palms of Atis'ura.

the Brahman street. There he kindled a fire in a sacrificial pit, and performed certain rites over it with the assistance of four Brahman priests. Then he caused the dog to be bathed, notwithstanding its unbearable barking, and dragged it struggling and yelling piteously round the sacred fire. Again, he caused the dog to be dipped in water and again, he dragged it round the fire, while the poor animal kept howling incessantly. While he was thus engaged, the *Rayar* came up and asked, "Why do you treat this dog thus?" Tennalirama replied, "I intend making this black dog a white one." The *Rayar* called him a mad man and bade him desist from the impossible attempt. Tennalirama promptly replied, "If a barber can become a Brahman, why cannot a black dog become a white dog?" The *Rayar* felt that the rebuke was just, and returned to the palace without going to the Brahman street, where there was great rejoicing.

XII

CAUTEPISATION OF BRAHMANS

WHEN the mother of the *Rayar* was about to die, she desired to eat a mango fruit, but before it was brought, she expired. The *Rayar* was very grieved that he could not fulfil the last wishes of his mother, and sending for some Brahmans, he said to them — "My mother set her heart on a mango fruit, but died before it was given her. By what means can I appease her soul?" To this, they replied — "If you make mango fruits of gold and present them to Brahmans on the occasion of the annual ceremony of your mother, her soul will be pacified." The *Rayar* believed it and presented the Brahmans with mangoes

made of gold. Next day, Tennaliraman invited to his house all those Brahmans who had received the *Rajai's* gifts saying that the annual ceremony of his mother was to be celebrated in his house. There he heated the handle of an iron ladle and cauterised the guests. They went away weeping, and reported the matter to the *Rajai*. The *Rajai* sent for Tennaliraman and said, "Why did you do this outrageous act?" He said, "My mother in her last moments was suffering from convulsions. Cauterising was recommended. But before the hot handle of the iron ladle could be brought, she expired. To appease her soul, I acted in this manner." On hearing this explanation, the *Rajai* laughed long and loud.

TALES OF MARIADA RAMAN

BY

MR. P. RAMACHANDRA RAO

[*The Tales of Mariada Raman* rival those of Tennali Raman in interest and popularity. The more amusing stories are presented in this collection. Mariada Raman was called to the Bench by a most fortuitous circumstance, but he upheld the dignity of his office with rare wisdom. Whether such a prodigy of judicial and detective acumen, as is depicted in *Mariada Raman*, really existed or whether the character is only the creation of a luxuriant brain, like Sir Conan Doyle's *Sherlock Holmes*, 'deponent sayeth not,' but the tales will be found to display, on the part of the hero, illimitable resources in the art of detection, a profound insight into human nature, and a remarkable perspicacity in the unravelling of truth. They are also not devoid of interest as affording the foreign reader a peep into the inner life and customs of the Hindus in Southern India.]

I

THE THIEVES OUT-WITTED

A GANG of four thieves in the Chola country, boarding for the time at an old woman's house, one day, entrusted her with the safe custody of a sealed brass pot containing their plunder, with strict injunctions that it was only to be returned on the joint demand of all four of them. One morning, as the thieves were seated on the verandah of a house near by, a butter-milk seller passed along the street and, wishing to have a drink of the butter-milk, they sent the youngest of them to fetch a vessel from the boarding-house woman. The young thief saw his opportunity in this, and, entering the house, informed the old lady that his companions had asked him to fetch the brass pot left with her. She, however, demurred to this, and referred to the original understanding, upon which the arch-rogue referred her to his friends seated outside. She shouted out to them asking if she might deliver *the* pot to their messenger, and they, thinking only of *a* pot they had sent him for, shouted back a reply in the affirmative. The safe deposit was accordingly returned, and the messenger disappeared with it through the backdoor of the house. The remaining three, after waiting in vain for the return of their companion with the vessel, entered the house, and were thunder-struck on learning what had actually happened. Resolved, however, to make the old lady pay for their own folly, they dragged her before the City Judge who, after due enquiry, pronounced judgment in favour of the thieves. As the unfortunate woman was returning home, loudly bewailing her misfortune

II

THE CHILD MURDERESS DETECTED

MARIADA Raman's father, when he heard of his son's honours and appointment at court, was not quite pleased at his good fortune. To him, it seemed that the office of a Judge was no empty honour, involving, as it did, the sifting of truth from a mass of falsehood. He, therefore, did his best to persuade his son to relinquish the office as, in his opinion, the Judge who gave an erroneous or unjust verdict was guilty of heinous sin. Mariada Raman, however, did not agree with his father's view, and declared that God had endowed him with a keenness of perception and wisdom sufficient to detect the hardest case, and that, acting to the best of his talents and placing his trust on Heavenly guidance, he feared not either going wrong or incurring sin. Seeing that his son was firm in his resolve, the father resigned him to his fate and decided to betake himself to the life of wanderer, so that he might not be on the spot to hear the cries of the litigants who might unjustly lose their causes by the mistakes of his son, and that he might not be a participator in his sin by associating with him.

He, accordingly, left the house, one day, without the knowledge of his son, and arrived, towards nightfall, at a neighbouring village, where he laid himself down to rest on the verandah of a house from which the master was absent. Now, it so happened that the owner of the house had two wives and a child by the younger of them, and that the latter was not very faithful to her husband. She awoke at midnight, when her infant and her co-wife were both fast asleep, and opening the door, admitted her paramour into the house.

Suddenly, she heard her baby set up a cry, and for fear that the household might be awakened and her guilt discovered, the wretched woman made no scruple to silence its cries by squeezing its neck. Having let her midnight visitor depart, she immediately began a most piercing lamentation for the death of her child, which she attributed to the first wife.

The officers of the law accordingly took up the parties to Mariada Raman, and, thither also, his father followed them in disguise. He had been awake all night, and had known the real facts of the case. He, therefore, said to himself, 'I shall see how my son acquits himself in this case, for if he succeeds in discovering the truth of this affair, he may well be trusted to elucidate the most intricate mystery.'

On hearing the parties, Mariada Raman was unable to make up his mind as to the real author of this child-murder. The second wife persisted in charging the first wife with the murder while the latter protested her innocence. The former declared that she herself had seen the crime perpetrated but had no witnesses, and the latter had nobody to vouch for her innocence but her own persistent protestation.

Mariada Raman inwardly prayed to God for guidance in the matter, and after a short deliberation, directed the two women, accuser and accused, to go round the assembly three times, quite naked, repeating their stories. No sooner did the junior wife, the real culprit, hear the words than she made ready to strip herself naked, but the elder declared that, rather than thus expose herself to shame, she was ready to admit that she had committed the crime. Mariada Raman was satisfied, from their respective behaviour, that the second wife was the real murderers of her

child, and began to interrogate her with such success that he forced her to confess her guilt and falsehood, and she was accordingly sentenced to be hanged

Mariada Raman's father was so delighted at his son's sharpness, that he threw off his disguise, went up to him and declared that he was overjoyed to find how well he deserved the honour and position conferred on him by the King, and that, henceforth, he had no doubt of his acquitting himself creditably in his office. He assured him also that he had known of the occurrences of the previous night, and that the real culprit was the unchaste wife, as Mariada Raman had so cleverly found out

III

THE COTTON MERCHANTS AND THEIR PET CAT

FOUR partners, who dealt in cotton bales, brought up a cat which served to keep rats off their goods. They treated their pet kitten with so much fondness, that, having apportioned its four legs among themselves, each loaded his own leg of the cat with costly golden anklets and other valuable jewels. One day, the cat happened to hurt one of its legs, and its owner accordingly bandaged the wounded limb with a rag soaked in oil. When the cat approached the hearth, its bandage caught fire, and as it limped and jumped about hither and thither, in great pain, the whole stock of cotton bales in the joint godown caught fire and was completely destroyed. The owner of the wounded leg was thereupon sued by the other three partners for

damages, on the ground that it was the wounded leg that had caused the conflagration of the cotton. Mariada Raman, before whom the cause came up, knew that the unfortunate defendant was not really to blame as he had intended nothing evil, and that the plaintiffs were preferring a frivolous claim against him. He, therefore, gave a decree whereby he directed that the three partners who owned the sound legs should make good to the owner of the wounded leg, the defendant, one quarter of the value of the cotton bales destroyed, because it was the sound legs which had helped the cat to jump about and set fire to the cotton bales.

IV

THIRITY versus THIRTY-THREE

TWO dairy women lived in opposite houses, one of whom owned only two cows, while the other was mistress of ten times that number. The latter, who was wanting in thrift, borrowed two pounds of ghee from the former with a promise to return it within a specified time, but when the day arrived and she was pressed to return the loan, she repudiated the transaction altogether.

Mariada Raman heard the case. The plaintiff had no witnesses, while the defendant supported her plea on the ground that she was far richer than the plaintiff, and that the alleged loan was ridiculous on the face of it.

Mariada Raman bade the parties attend on the following day, and, in the meantime, caused a miry puddle to be made right across the way

to the Court-house, so that anyone arriving there must needs wade through it

On the parties appearing before him, next day, with their legs besmeared knee-deep with mud, Mariada Raman caused the women to be supplied with two vessels full of water, and of exactly equal capacity, and ordered them to wash their legs before entering the Court. The plaintiff, after removing all vestiges of mud from her legs, had still half a pot of water left, while the defendant had used up all her water, and still one of her legs was dirty. Mariada Raman rightly concluded from this, that the defendant was a thriftless woman, and that the plea of wealth was untenable. She had doubtless borrowed the ghee as alleged by the plaintiff, and he decreed its immediate restoration

V

THE FALSE WITNESSES EXPOSED

A CERTAIN person, about to start on a distant pilgrimage to Benares and other holy places, deposited with a merchant for safe custody, during his absence, a valuable ruby, which he did not care either to leave at home, or to carry on his person. On his return from pilgrimage, some four years later, he claimed his ruby back from the merchant, but the latter, wishing to appropriate the jewel to himself, replied that he already returned the ruby in the presence of three witnesses, and to support him in his falsehood, he hired his own washerman, barber, and potter, who were under obligations to him, and who were prepared to support him through thick and thin

who sent for the debtor and questioned him. The latter denied ever having borrowed money, or executed a bond, or torn it as alleged. Dismissing the parties for the day, Mariada Raman sent for the creditor and, privately, asked him about the size of the bond alleged to have been destroyed. The latter, speaking the truth, said it was about a *span* long, upon which Mariada Raman advised him to say, when again questioned in the presence of the debtor on the following day, that it was a *cubit* in length. The following day, accordingly, in the presence of the defendant, Mariada Raman, after cautioning the plaintiff to speak the truth, asked him to specify the exact size of the bond. The plaintiff declared that it was a cubit in length, when the debtor, in an unguarded moment, blurted out that it was an astounding lie, for in fact, the bond was only a span in length, and added that a person who could speak such an audacious falsehood in a court of justice, was not entitled to be heard. This was exactly what Mariada Raman had wished to elicit from the husbandman, and being satisfied that his denials were grossly untrue, he directed him to return the amount borrowed forthwith with interest, and also awarded him fitting punishment for the mischief and perjury committed by him.

VII

IRON EATING RATS *versus* MAN EATING KITS

A HARDWARE merchant, who had occasion to go abroad, left his stock-in-trade in charge of a friend, but, on claiming it on his return, was met with the reply that a colony of rats had invaded the store, and eaten up all

the iron. He accordingly complained to Mariada Raman, who put him up to a trick of the same kind as his friend had played upon him. The result was that the merchant, apparently, resumed friendly relations with him, and, one festival day, invited his opponent's son home to participate in the merry-making. He, however, failed to send back the boy, as promised, but concealed him somewhere, and on being questioned by his friend, replied that as he was bringing the lad home, a kite had pounced upon him and carried him off. The father, in his turn, invoked the aid of Mariada Raman, who heard both parties, and after severely admonishing them for the patent falsehood of their amazing assertions, directed that each of them should forthwith return the other's property on pain of being incarcerated for perjury.

VIII

THE PEARLS RECOVERED

A CERTAIN merchant who had two costly pearls worth a thousand rupees each, when proceeding on a journey, entrusted the pearls to his neighbour to be returned to him when he came back. On his return, he claimed his deposit, but his neighbour, taking advantage of the fact that there were no witnesses to the transaction, denied that he had ever been entrusted with any pearls. Mariada Raman, after examining both the parties, and keenly observing their demeanour, came to the conclusion that the case was true as represented by the plaintiff, but to make assurance doubly sure, he deferred judgment for a few days. Meanwhile, he

acquainted himself from the plaintiff's deposition with the exact size and appearance of his pearls. He then obtained ninety-eight pearls of the same quality, size and appearance which he pasted through an old worn-out string, and sent for the defendant, to whom he handed them with a request to have them re-strung on a new silken cord. As he did so, he told him he had every confidence in his integrity and that he trusted he would return the entire 100 intact. The defendant, who felt honoured by this mark of confidence, cheerfully undertook to do so, but on coming home and counting the pearls he found only 98. Imagining that the missing ones must have been lost on the way, and fearing an unfavourable verdict in the merchant's suit if he reported the deficiency, he quietly substituted the pearls he had robbed the merchant of, and returned a string of 100 pearls to Mariada Raman. When the Judge found his suspicions confirmed, he passed suitable sentence on the defendant.

IX

THE RING RESTORED

A CERTAIN person, on pretence of having to show himself off before his relations, borrowed a golden ring of a friend, but never cared to return it. The owner a few days later, asked for its return, when the man, who had borrowed it, repudiated the loan point blank, and roundly denounced him as a liar. The owner, then, took the matter to Mariada Raman, who summoned and questioned the borrower, but the latter characterized it as a most shameless and impudent

claim. As there was no witness on either side, Mariada Raman sent for a third person to test and weigh the gold, saying, as he handed him the ring, that he (Mariada Raman) would, under the circumstances, divide the value of the ring equally between the rival claimants. He, however, first took care to convey a secret hint to the mediator to take away as much gold as he could in the process of testing it on the touchstone, and to under-estimate both its quality and value, and he sent a man along with the parties, to observe what occurred. As the mediator was transferring the gold from the ring to the touchstone, the real owner kept protesting against this, when he heard the quality and value underestimated, he fairly broke down, and began to weep, while the borrower remained mute, and quite unconcerned, all the while. Upon their respective demeanours being reported to Mariada Raman, he at once found out the culprit, and restored his ring to the complainant. Herein was verified the saying, that ill-gotten gold has neither quality nor value.

X

THE FOWL THIEF BETRAYS HERSELF

A WOMAN'S fowl was stolen by her neighbour, who caught it on its straying into her house, and immediately cooked and made a meal of it. The owner had seen the bird enter the house of her neighbour, and questioned her about it, but the culprit swore, by all the gods of the world, that she had never set eyes on it. The owner, thereupon, complained to Mariada Raman, but the thief persisted in her protestation of innocence.

As there was no evidence, Mariada Raman dismissed the parties home. He was, however, determined upon getting at the root of the matter, and hit upon a piece of acting which would throw the thief off her guard, if thief she was, as he more than half suspected. Just as the two women were leaving the Court, Mariada Raman in a voice loud enough to be heard by them, addressed the following words to those present in Court: "Has there ever been seen such impudence on the part of a woman, who after stealing her neighbour's fowl, has the effrontery to appear in Court actually with a feather of the fowl sticking on her head, and then to deny all knowledge of the crime imputed to her?" This game of bluff, fortunately, met with success, for as soon as the words reached her ears, the stupid thief fell headlong into the snare set for her, and imagining that she had been detected, at once, passed her hand over her head to see if the fowl's feather was sticking to it. This was enough for Mariada Raman, who at once concluded that she had appropriated the stray fowl, and subjecting her to a close interrogation, forced the truth from her own lips.

XI

THE BROKEN CROCKERY SET OFF AGAINST THE DEAD ELEPHANT

A GENTLEMAN who desired to conduct the wedding procession of his son with suitable splendour, borrowed, from a Mussalman, an elephant to accompany the procession. During the progress of the procession, the elephant died all of a sudden through some unknown cause. The borrower, at

XII

THE CATTLE THIEF DETECTED

TWO cow-herds had their cattle pens close to one another, and one of them, who had often occasion to be away from home, used to request the other to look after his herd during his absence. On one of these occasions, the resident cow-herd took advantage of the other's absence, and substituted three of his bull calves for three of his neighbours cows. Some time later the absentee's herd was totally destroyed by cattle disease. He then fell upon evil days, was reduced to want, and was compelled to lead a precarious life. He, one day, begged the other to give him some milk to drink. Upon the latter offering him some, he at once declared that it tasted like the milk of his cows, and took the other before Mariada Raman. The thief, of course denied the charge and challenged the complainant to adduce evidence in support of his accusation. Asked how he could identify his cow from merely tasting its milk, the complainant answered that he had a peculiarly keen sense of taste, which enabled him to make the identification. Mariada Raman who naturally desired to test so wildly improbable and incredible a story, and to judge whether absolute reliance could be placed on the plaintiff's words, adjourned the case for 15 days, and in the meantime, caused three seed-plots to be prepared with different kinds of manure, namely, cow-dung, sheep-dung, and rubbish, and sowed a crop of greens thereon. When the latter were ready to gather he caused them to be cooked and served to the rival claimants, together with curds prepared from a compound of cow's milk, sheep's milk and buffalo's milk. The thief ate

the food voraciously, and pronounced it excellent, but the real owner turned up his nose at the repast, and declared that the vegetables had been grown with three different kinds of manure, and the curds obtained, from three different sorts of milk. Mariada Raman, finding that the complainant did in reality possess the extraordinary sense of taste claimed by him, began to question the thief in a searching manner, when the latter at last confessed his guilt and received his due meed of punishment. Here was an illustration of the saying that, sooner or later, murder will be out.

TALES OF RAJA BIRBAL

BY

R. KULASEKHARAM, B.A., L.T.

[The name of Birbal is as famous in Northern India as that of Tenzali Raman is in the South. Birbal was a great wit and courtier. An account of his life is to be found in the "Ain I-Akbari" of Abul Fazl. Raja Birbal was a Brahman Bhat or minstrel. According to Badauni, he came soon after Akbar's accession from Kalpi to court where his bon mots in a short time made him a general favourite. His Hindi verses were also much liked, and Akbar conferred on him the title of *Kat Rai* or (Hindu) *Port Laureate*, and had him constantly near himself. He was often employed in political missions. He accompanied Akbar on his forced march to Patna and Ahmedabad. He spent his time chiefly at court. In his 31st year, he was asked to march against the Yusufzais in Bajour and Swat where he fell with his 8,000. Akbar felt the loss very keenly all through his life. It is not easy to estimate the share which Birbal had in the religious evolution of Akbar's mind. There are several small books containing the so called stories of Birbal in Urdu, and the other languages of Northern India. The following are a selection of some of the more interesting stories.]

THE EARLY HISTORY OF BIRBAL

— o —

ABDUL Khadir Badauni, Abul Fazl† and Moulana Azath are the three writers who furnish us with information regarding Birbal, the greatest wit at Akbar's court. The first two have recorded only fragments of his life in the Padshah's court. The third has written a somewhat complete account of the life and doings of the Raja, and we are indebted to it for much of our information regarding Birbal.

Birbal was born in 1541 A.D. in an insignificant village known as Marjal on the banks of the river Godavari. He was born in a pious Brahman family of the Surber sect. The lad was hardly four years old when his father was taken away by the cruel hand of death. There are conflicting accounts as to his early life. Moulana Azath, relying on some authorities, gives the original name of the hero as Hesh Das and considers him to have been a Brahman of the Bhat sect. Abdul Khadir agrees with this writer in regarding Birbal as a Brahman, but differs as to the original name and place of birth. According to him, the name was Brahm Das and the place of birth Kalpi. The death of the

* Badauni was an orthodox Muhammadan historian. He was a very remarkable man.

Under instructions from Akbar, he translated the Ramayana from its original Sanskrit into Persian, as well as part of the Mahabharata. His chief historical work is *Tarikh-i-Badauni* or *Annals of Badauni*. It is a very favourite book with bigoted Muhammadans who disliked the innovations of Akbar. "Akbar" by G. B. Mallison, c. 91.

† Faizi and Abul Fazl were brothers. They were two learned men who enjoyed very intimate friendship with Akbar. They possessed the same eclectic spirit in religion as Akbar.

father Kali Das told severely on the poor mother who soon followed her husband. Birbal had two brothers the elder brother Mohan Ram died in infancy, and the younger Ganga Ram renounced the world and went to the forests of Nepal to lead the life of a recluse. Then Birbal, who had been left helpless, had to be taken care of by his father's relatives. But fate was not relentless. The chief pandit of the State of Kalinjar gave his daughter in marriage to him. He now lived a life of affluence and ease at his father-in-law's house. The father-in-law died soon after, and Birbal was made the chief pandit of the State. The new pandit distinguished himself so much that, before long, his fame spread beyond the confines of the small State.

BIRBAL'S INTRODUCTION INTO THE
COURT OF AKBAR

THERE are different accounts as to how Birbal came to be introduced to Akbar's court. One account has it that he relinquished his post in Kalinjar, and went to Delhi. Here his learning and piety helped him to become the *muohit** of one Ramchand, a very wealthy man. But Birbal's wit could not be hidden under a bushel and accounts of his wit and humour were related in the bazaars of Delhi. Akbar came to hear of Birbal. In his court, there were many learned men, but there was no court fool (*mushkara*). Birbal was taken to the court that he might please the Padsha (Emperor) in his leisure hours. According to Moulana Azath, Akbar and Birbal met by some accident and became friends. Abdul

* The family priest

Khader Badauni writes "Akbar from the beginning had a liking for the Hindus. One day he met this poor Brahman priest Brahm Das of Kalpi singing for alms in the streets of Delhi. He took pity on him and liked him for his music and wit. Their acquaintance gradually grew into intimate friendship." There is still another account of the introduction of Birbal into the court of Akbar.

One day, an attendant of the Padsha served him *pansupari** with a little too much of chunam. As a result of it, the Emperor's mouth smarted. He grew angry and ordered the attendant to go and purchase from the bazaar a quarter of a measure of chunam. The servant, when he went to the bazaar, met Birbal there.

The latter, who was inquisitive by nature, asked him why he required so much chunam. The servant narrated to him what had happened. Whereon, Birbal warned him that the chunam which he was buying was meant to be used by the angry monarch to bring about his destruction. He further advised the servant to buy along with it an equal quantity of ghee and instructed him to drink the ghee if he is compelled to consume the chunam. The servant then went to the Padsha and was ordered by him to dissolve the chunam in water and drink the solution. The servant obeyed and afterwards drank the ghee. When the servant appeared again before the Padsha uninjured, he was asked to explain how he managed to survive the draught. The servant related how he acted up to the advice of the stranger. Akbar wondered at the device adopted, and sent for Birbal. When Birbal came, the Padsha received him very kindly and ordered that he should henceforth be attached to his court.

* Betel leaf and nut which Indians are in the habit of chewing.

Birbal's culture and the keen sense of humour with which nature had endowed him eminently fitted him to play his role in the court. He was well acquainted with Urdu literature so much so that Akbar soon made him the *malhushora* (the Poet Laureate) and paid him two thousand gold mohurs per month. The Emperor was lavish in the honours that he conferred on him. The learned Brahman was the recipient of so many titles that it is said that one had to write at least two lines before one could actually give all his titles. Besides all this, the Padsha conferred on him also the title of 'Raja'. Indeed, Birbal rose so high in Akbar's favour and grew so intimate with him, that many a time the presence of the wit was required even in the royal bed-chamber to regale the Emperor.

I

BIRBAL'S EARLY HUMOUR

WHEN Birbal was six years old, he used to keep company with a mischievous Mussalman lad. The two lads once observed a certain pair of dogs playing together. The colour of the bitch was black, and might be therefore called in Urdu, Kali, a black one. The name of Birbal's mother was also Kali. "Look how Kali plays with the dog," said the Mussalman lad. Though Birbal was only a young child, yet there were indications of his prospective wit. He retorted, "In your eyes the bitch is black, but pray ask the dog, she is *Nemath* (a blessing) in his eyes." Now the mother of the Muhammadan lad was called Nemath, and the rebuke went home to him.

II

TO MAKE A LINE SHORTER

AFTER a vexatious debate in the court, the Padsha drew a line on the floor and asked his courtiers, who were hotly discussing as to who was the wisest among them, to make it shorter without rubbing off a portion of it. The courtiers did not know what to do, and kept silent. Then Birbal stood up at once and drew a longer line by its side. The king and the courtiers agreed that the original line was now made shorter by comparison with the longer one.

III

THE SON-IN-LAW WORSE THAN THE DOG.

ONE day Akbar asked Birbal to present before him one of the Emperor's relations who was ungrateful, and one not related to him but who was grateful to him. Birbal agreed to do so and brought to the court the Padsha's son-in-law and a dog. The courtiers thought that it was against rules to take a dog into the royal presence. But objectionable as the procedure was, they dared not cross Birbal. He went to the king straightway and said, "Those whom Huzur¹ wished to see are in readiness."

* Dogs had been looked upon by Muhammadans as unclean animals, and the strict Muhammadans of the present day still regard them as such. Akbar declared them to be clean — Akbar, by G. B. Malleson esq., *PURAN OF INDIA SERIES*.

It is curious to note that the orthodox Hindus whose ways of looking at things are generally different from those of the Muhammadans, are at one with them in this respect.

† Your Majesty

"Let us see them," observed Akbar. "Here is the ungrateful one," said Birbal pointing to the young man. "Though you gave him your daughter and several lakhs of rupees, yet he is not satisfied and speaks ill of your Majesty behind your back." "Well, let us have a look at the other," observed the Padsha trying to put on a cheerful face. Birbal produced the dog and said, here is the grateful one. He is satisfied with a crust of bread and keeps guard at the door. He keeps awake when the master sleeps and sees that no harm comes to him."

IV

THE MILK OF A BULLOCK

ONCE, the Padsha ordered Birbal to procure for him the milk of a bullock. The latter was at his wits' end, and prayed for a week's time just to put off the monarch's wrath. No sooner was the request made than it was granted. Birbal then went home, and sat down quite dejected. His wife, who was a wise and clever lady, thought that the king might have proposed some riddle which he was not able to solve. She approached her husband and asked him as to what troubled his mind. He replied, "The king has ordered me to supply him with the milk of a bullock, and hence I am dejected not knowing what to do." The wife smiled and said that it was not a difficult task and that she would help him. "I shall, however, lay down one condition," she said, "that you don't leave the house for one week, and let me have your company all to myself." Birbal was not unwilling to act as

desired. On the seventh day, she decked herself, took a bundle of clothes, and went to the tank opposite to the royal palace to wash them. She began washing the clothes on the steps of the tank. The Padsha, when he beheld the beautiful lady so richly dressed engaged in such menial work as washing clothes, wondered what could have made her do so, and sent for her. And on her being brought to his presence, the Emperor observed "Tell us, fair lady, what has put you to the necessity of washing clothes?"

"May it please your Majesty," she answered, "My husband brought forth a child a week ago, our servant has left us without notice. I am thus put to the necessity of having to wash the clothes of the confinement-room."

"May Allah save us! What is the world coming to? Is there indeed such a man?"

"The world is certainly come to a strange pass when her ruler requires his ministers to procure for him bullock's milk." Akbar understood that she was the wife of Birbal and sent her home with rich presents.

V

AKBAR'S VANITY PEBBLED

AKBAR'S tastes and fancies constantly underwent changes. In his last days, he conceived a liking for European costume and used to dress himself like a white Sahib. He was fond of costly jewels and always wore a necklace of pearls. One evening as he was walking along

the sea-shore, he flung his precious ornament over the waves. But no sooner had he done so, than he ordered Birbal to fetch it back. "Pray, excuse me," replied the wit, "let it travel on the waves, so that it may proclaim thy glory in the land of the Whites," and the Padsha was silent.

VI

THE ILL-OMENED MAN

ONCE Akbar asked Birbal, if he knew of any man of ill-omen in Delhi. "Yes, I have heard of a man in the city," replied Birbal, "and it is said of him that if one were to look on his face early in the morning, one would not get a crust of bread the whole day." "Bring him here one morning and we shall try the experiment," said the Emperor. Birbal brought the unlucky man to the Padsha's palace and arranged matters in such a way that he was the first person whom the Emperor saw after getting up from bed. It somehow happened that the Emperor was so busy that day, engaged in the business of the State, that he could not find time to eat till the evening. He sent for Birbal, and observed, "The man is undoubtedly of very ill-omen, let him, therefore, be hanged." Birbal replied, "O king of kings, because you saw his face in the morning, you could not find time to eat, but he is to be hanged because he looked on your Majesty's face. Now, pray, decide who is the more ill-omened person." Akbar saw the unwisdom of his order, and accordingly remitted the sentence.

* With all his liberality and breadth of view, Akbar himself was not free from superstition—*Akbar, RULERS OF INDIA SERIES*

VII

THE SIX BEST THINGS

ON a fine evening, Akbar and Birbal went through an avenue of trees in Delhi, enjoying the delicious breeze. The conversation turned on various topics. They talked of the glories of the tropical sky, of the grandeur of the sunset, as it would appear when viewed from one of the loftiest palaces, of the calm repose of the huge trees whose foliage rustled with the gentle breeze, and of the birds of variegated plumage which were seeking their night's shelter. They reflected on the goodness of the Creator who was the author of the sky and the rainbow-coloured clouds. As they walked along, a gurgling gushing brook attracted their attention. On approaching it, they were charmed by the weird, twisted picture of the sky, clouds and trees which the brook in its tortuous course mirrored forth. They sat for a while on its bank inhaling the cool air laden with the fragrance of a thousand forest flowers. Then as they were leaving that pleasant spot, Akbar asked Birbal to name to him what he considered as the best milk, the best leaf, the best flower, the best fruit, the best king and the best sweetness. Birbal stood up and answered, "Mother's milk is the best because the child grows to be a great man on it. The *pan* is the most useful among leaves because everyone chews it. The flower of the cotton plant claims the foremost rank among flowers because it clothes us. A dutiful son is indeed the best fruit because the virtues of the ancestors continue to live in him. Indra is the most benevolent among kings because he sends down rain which nourishes the whole earth. The sweetness of kind words is the most pleasing because one wins the affection of people thereby without spending any money."

VIII

BIRBAL ON THE QUESTION OF
SHAVING THE BEARD

ONE day when Akbar was holding his *darbar*, a discussion arose among his courtiers as to the question of shaving the beard. Those learned in Muhammadan lore quoted verses from the Koran, to prove that the beard should on no account be shaved. "If the beard is shaved," said they, "One would commit a heinous sin." There were some astute Brahmans in the court who were of opinion that there was considerable wisdom evinced in the injunction that a man should grow his beard. "For," said they, "Arabia is subject to the extremes of temperature, and in the winter, chill winds, perchance, blow in the country, so that the Prophet, solicited of the health of the faithful, ordained that they should grow their beards, in order that the hair might protect the glands of the throat, and ward off diseases." The discussion was, however, a profitless one, and was taking too much of the valuable time of the Emperor. Birbal saw this, rose, and, addressing the monarch said, "May it please your Majesty, order a razor to be brought, and I shall shave off the beards of all the learned Aalims and Faazils" assembled here and then there will be no discussion regarding beards." There was a truce to all discussion as they were afraid lest the Padsha should agree to the suggestion of his favourite †

* Both the words are Arabic. An Aalim is a learned man and a Faazil is a doctor of learning.

† In the later years of his reign, Akbar introduced, to the great annoyance of the bigoted party at his court, the practice of shaving the beard. In a hot country such as

IX

THE WATER IN THE GANGES IS AMRIT

ONCE the Padsha asked Birbal to tell him which river contained the best water. Birbal answered that the water in the Jumna was the best. The Emperor remarked, "According to your religion, the water of the Ganges is the best, and you must indeed be very ignorant of Hindu beliefs, since you speak of the water of the Jumna as being the best." Birbal rejoined that what was contained in the Ganges was not water, but Amrit.

India, the advantages arising from the use of the razor are too obvious to need discussion. But although the order was not obligatory, the compliance or non compliance with the custom became a distinguishing mark at the imperial court. Few things are more repugnant to a devout Mussalman than the shaving of his beard. It was so then, and it is so now. The example set in this respect by the sovereign caused then many murmurs and much secret discontent.—AKBAR RULERS OF INDIA SERIES

Akbar, in 1000 (1592 A D), forced his courtiers to shave off their beards.—*Ain i Akbari* translated by Blochman

The long beard was worn by all good Muslims, but Akbar ordered the officers of his court to appear with shaven faces. This was in the year 1592, when he was fifty years old.—THE MOGUL EMPERORS OF HINDUSTAN by E S Holden

1 The door of Shah Akbar, the victorious, is a Paradise of rest,

2 And if I have my beard, I do so not to beautify myself!

3 But because beards, like crimes, are of a deep black dye, and can, therefore, have no place in a Paradise—*Ghayuri of Hicar*

* The drink of the Gods

X

THE JEALOUSY OF THE COURTIER'S REBUKED

WHEN the courtiers saw that Birbal was enjoying the special favour of the King, they became jealous of him and tried their best to get rid of him from the *darbar*. Some of the favoured ones among them who were intimate with Akbar represented to him that Birbal did not possess any special qualities which were absent in themselves and that it was not advisable that a man so vain as he should occupy a high position. The Padsha answered that Birbal performed deeds which the others could not possibly do. Then they begged of him to set them a task which he thought was beyond their capacity. He promised to do so in due time and ordered that Birbal should not be admitted into the *darbar* any more. Two or three days after this incident, he ordered them to have a *razar*,^{*} 4 feet long and 3 feet wide, made. A few hours later, the *razar* of the required dimensions was produced before the Emperor. Then the Padsha said to the courtiers, "I shall lie down and you will cover my body completely with *razar*." All of them tried their best to do so but failed. He ordered that Birbal should be sent for. Birbal came and requested to be informed what he had to do. The Padsha pointing to the cloth said "Cover me completely with yonder *razar*." Forthwith, he folded the king's legs a little and covered the body completely with the *razar*. The courtiers remarked that Birbal ought not to have folded the Padsha's legs as it was a piece of impudence. Birbal answered, "There is a maxim that one should not stretch one's legs beyond the length of the *razar*."

* A bed-sheet

XI

TOBACCO AND THE ASS

MULLA Dopiazza and Raja Birbal were the two learned and famous jesters in the court of Akbar. They delighted the king with an exercise of their wit. Though Mulla Dopiazza was the equal of Raja Birbal in point of ability, the latter was the greater favourite of the Padsha, and there was no limit to the extent of liberty Birbal could take with the Emperor.

One day, Akbar and Birbal were seated on the terrace of the royal palace. Opposite to them there was a tobacco field on which an ass was standing. Birbal was fond of smoking and chewing tobacco. Therefore, the Padsha, directing his attention towards the field, observed, "See tobacco is such a bad thing that even an ass does not like to eat it." Birbal, smiling rejoined, "Only people who are like the ass discard the fragrant leaf."

XII

THE MOST IMPORTANT LEAF

ONCE upon a time, after a sumptuous dinner, when the Padsha was surrounded by his courtiers, he asked them which was the most important leaf. After a consultation, they submitted to him that they considered the plantain leaf to be the most important one as it was the largest in size. The answer was not acceptable to the king. Birbal who was seated near the throne, exclaimed that the *pan* was the leaf *par excellence* because it gave a sweet breath to the royal lips. All applauded Birbal and the Padsha also was pleased.

XIII

DIFFERENT KINDS OF BLIND MEN

ONE day, Akbar, reprimanding Birbal for some fault, called him a blind man "Pardon me, Your Majesty," said Birbal, "there are many kinds of blind men, of what kind am I?" The Padsha, taken aback a little, asked him to mention the different classes of blind men. There are two main classes," answered Birbal, "*viz.*, those who have no eyes and those who have eyes, but are still blind in one way or other. The last class again has three sub-divisions, *viz.*, 1 Those who have eyes, but do not make use of them, 2 Those who are blinded by wealth and 3 Those who are blind in some organ of their body such as the foot. And I am sure there is many another kind of blind men, but I am forgetful at present" The Padsha ordered Birbal to give him concrete examples of the different classes of blind men.

A few days afterwards, he went to the market place, spread his *ummal*, sat thereon with ink and paper before him and went on writing. Some of the servants of the *Sulha* † by whom he was recognised asked him what he was doing there and Birbal wrote down their names. Next day, he went to the prominent officials dressed shabbily. They thought that the Padsha might have been displeased with him. Some of them did not speak to him, while others said — "We do not know who you are." Whereon Birbal took down their names under the category of men blinded by wealth. He issued a notice to these

* The cloth worn over the shoulders

† The king.

two classes of men to be present at court on a certain day. He himself went to the court on that day, and, receiving them, asked them to wait till they received further orders. He then saw the Padsha and informed him that he had brought with him two kinds of blind men and they would be presented before him, if required. The Padsha wanted them to be produced. Birbal produced them and also gave the lists. "My lists give the classification and Huzur may satisfy himself," said he. First, the Padsha wanted Birbal to point out those who were blind in the eyes. When Birbal presented the people whom he had put under that head, the Emperor remarked in anger that only a blind man would say that they were blind in the eyes.

"May Your Majesty pardon me," said Birbal, "one day, I spread my *ummal* in the market place and sitting thereon, was writing. These people asked me what I was doing, although they saw what I was doing. Hence I have put them down as people blind in the eyes." The Padsha burst into a hearty laugh and asked Birbal to produce those who may be regarded as having been rendered blind by wealth. Birbal, pointing to those who did not recognise him when he was poorly dressed, said, "May Huzur be pleased to ask these whether they can make out who I am." When the Padsha looked at them, those officials were ashamed and did not know what to say. Birbal observed, "I went to their houses in this poor dress and they recognised me not. So I thought that wealth had deprived them of ordinary vision which men possess." The Padsha laughed again, and asked Birbal to try and produce before him people who may be regarded as being blind in the legs. The ever-resourceful wit promised to do so ere long.

A few days later, there was a great concourse of people in the Padsha's palace on account of a feast. After dusk, Birbal entered the palace followed by some companions. The latter, as they came along, shouted that the palace had caught fire. Several people rushed out being frightened, and in the hurry, wrongly put on shoes not belonging to them. When they came out, there was no fire, and they soon discovered that Birbal and his accomplices were responsible for the scare.

The Vazir represented to Akbar that Birbal was liable to be punished for having raised a false alarm. The Padsha called on his favourite to explain his conduct. Birbal replied "Oh, king, I wanted to test whether the people were blind in the legs or not. Huzur will see that only a few people are wearing their own shoes. The others have exchanged theirs, wherefore I deem them to be blind in the legs." The courtiers, who would fain have Birbal somehow disgraced, felt ashamed when they heard this. The Padsha enjoyed a hearty laugh and richly rewarded Birbal.

XIV

BIRBAL ACTS THE PART OF A CHILD

ONCE Akbar held a grand durbar. There were present around him all his ministers, all the generals of his forces, the feudatory princes and several nobles. The eyes of all present were in quest of one important figure of the Emperor's court, viz., Birbal who was at once the chief jester as well as the favourite adviser of the Emperor. The Padsha was all impatience to see him, and so sent word to him to be p

at the darbar immediately. When Birbal came and took his seat, the Padsha asked him why he was so late.

"My Lord," said Birbal, "I should have been here long ago but for my little son who was cross. He was weeping his eyes out for I know not what. And it took me all this time to appease him." "What," asked the Padsha, "is it so difficult a task to pacify a child?" Birbal answered, "My Lord knows little of such things. You have no children and even if you have, the duty of looking after them will not devolve on your Imperial Majesty."

"No, no," said the Emperor, "I am not ignorant in such matters and had I been you, I should have easily satisfied the child."

To this, Birbal made reply, "My Lord, what are your humble subjects but your children. Now I, one of your subjects, shall start being cross with you like a child and do you then make trial of your skill?" The Padsha instantly agreed to this. And Birbal began crying most piteously like a child. The Emperor descended from his throne trying to act his part, and asked him in tender, soothing tones, "My son, what ails you, why do you cry, and what will you have? Would you have toys, fruits or flowers? My darling, do but name your wish and you shall have it instantly." This but seemed to make the baby all the more cross and he cried still more violently. The royal father, after a great deal of trouble, got him to prattle out, "Papa, I want a stick of sugar cane." Greatly relieved in mind, Akbar ordered a number of them to be brought, and the baby was allowed his choice of them. Taking one of these, Birbal, the baby, started crying again as if his heart would break. The Padsha wondering what

the baby wanted tried to comfort him again, and, after some trouble, found that the baby now desired the cane to be cut into nice thin slices. But the astonishment of the Emperor knew no bounds, when the baby started crying at the top of his voice when the wondering servants set before him the plate of sliced sugar-cane. The Emperor applied himself to the task of soothing the child. What was his surprise when he learnt now that the baby now desired his royal father to re-construct the sugar-cane from the slices? By this last request, Akbar was completely baffled and gave up the game, declaring Birbal to be the victor.

XV

BIRBAL AND TANSEN

AS Birbal grew in the good-will and favour of Akbar, he naturally became an object of jealousy to the Muhammadan noblemen that formed part of his Court. They could not but resent the King's seeking Birbal's advice in all matters affecting the State. This feeling gradually acquired such strength that they determined as a body to approach Akbar on the subject.

Now there lived a famous musician of the name of Tansen* who had earned for himself many titles and a great reputation in the courts of the various princes of Northern India. Tansen was not an infidel like Birbal who was a Brahman.

* There were thirty six principal musicians in Akbar's Court. Miyan Tansen was at the head of them all. Ramchand was the patron of Tansen before he came to the Emperor's Court. Most of his compositions are written in Akbar's name and his melodies are very popular in Northern India even at the present day.

and an idolater Tansen, they said to themselves, is as great a musician as Birbal and what is more, a true Mussalman. And, therefore, mustering courage, they, in a body, petitioned the great Emperor that he would graciously be pleased to appoint Tansen in the place of Birbal and accord to him a position of greater dignity than that which Birbal enjoyed. This, they said, would afford incalculable pleasure to the Faithful.

Not a little surprised at this strange request, Akbar remarked, "I know Tansen well, he is proficient only in music and knows next to nothing of state-craft. Moreover, he does not possess the superior intellect of Birbal." Thus foiled in their attempt, they retired from the royal presence, but jealousy grew all the stronger in their hearts, and they would not give up their attempts to displace Birbal from Akbar's favour.

The schemers met one night in a courtier's house and the spirit of rivalry was very keen as to who should offer the best suggestion which would pave the way for the Hindu's ruin.

"I have arranged for a musical party in my house, to-morrow night, when Tansen will play his soul-bewitching tunes. Shall we not invite the Padsha to come and listen to Tansen," said one of the number.

"Amen!" cried all, "may the Prophet come to our rescue!"

"I swear by the beard of the Prophet," exclaimed one of the noblemen, "unless something is done to check the ascendancy of the Hindus, we, the Faithful, shall be nowhere ere long."

So, a grand musical performance was got up in the house of one of the noblemen and Akbar was present on the occasion. Tansen was at his

best and the Padsha certainly expressed his admiration for the musical talents of Tansen.

"May Your Majesty live long!" explained the noble host, "now that you recognise the merit of Tansen, will you henceforth be pleased to make him your *protege* and the recipient of greater honours than Birbal?"

"You are very much mistaken," answered the Emperor, "there is no comparison between Tansen and Birbal, the insignificant mosquito may as well grow jealous of the elephant! Nothing will be so absurd as raising him to the position of one of my advisers"

But Akbar after a while thought it would be best to demonstrate to his courtiers once for all the intellectual superiority of Birbal. He wrote two letters to the King of Burma in which he desired the bearers to be put to death. Birbal and Tansen were each given a copy of it and desired to take it to the King of Burma. Birbal was not without his misgivings. A thing like this had not occurred before, but he had done no wrong and felt sure that his knowledge of human nature and his sound common-sense would stand him in good stead even in Burma.

Birbal and Tansen started on their journey, and, after many difficulties, reached the capital of Burma. As they arrived there only after nightfall, the gates of the city had been closed and the travellers had to halt at a way-side inn during the night. At day-break, they reported themselves to the officers of the king, who presented them before the king, in due time. The king, when he read the epistles, was at a loss to understand why Akbar, who was reputed to be wise and just, should have requested him to put to death two persons, who, to all appearances, were quite innocent. There was no reason assigned for the

visitation of such a punishment on them. He referred the matter to his chief minister who said it would be a good idea to put them in prison apprising them that if in a week's time they did not disclose what their offence was, they would be put to death. The king agreed with his minister and said to Birbal and Tansen, "Well, listen to me. The Emperor has ordered that you should be put to death. Forsooth, you have committed so heinous a crime that he does not want that even your bones should find a resting place in your native land. But I shall not put you to death, unless I know the offence and I myself deem you deserving of the punishment. You shall, therefore, be allowed a week's time in our prison to confess."

Birbal bowed to the king, and Tansen in whom all sense was displaced by benumbing fear, simply followed suit. Then they were both led out and put in prison. Now Tansen said to Birbal that he was entirely in his hands, and such a clever man as Birbal should certainly be able to hit on some means of escape.

"Aye, escape is not impossible even at this stage," answered Birbal, "clear up and take courage when we are led out to be executed, let us each want to be put to death before the other. Leave the rest to me, and I shall so manage matters that our lives will not be lost."

You will then have the thanks and blessings of my poor old mother," said Tansen.

On the morning of the eighth day, Birbal and Tansen were conducted to the place of execution, and lo! the wrangling between the two men as to who should be put to death first quite surprised the executioners. They thought there was something wonderful about the men and conducted them to the king's presence and represented to him

their strange conduct. The king was astonished at what he heard and said, "You men of India, your fearlessness is indeed strange. Do you tell me at least now what your offence is, and I shall pardon you." Birbal forthwith replied, "My Lord, Akbar has grave reasons for having our present lives terminated and it behoves us not to disclose them to you."

"Fie on your madness! Why are you so foolish? It is not right that one quits a life before one has derived the full benefit that can accrue from it. Further, it is against the *dhamma** to put innocent people to death."

"I shall disclose to you the great secret," answered Birbal, "to satisfy your curiosity, but neither of us is troubled by fear of death. For a long time, the ambitious Mughal Emperor has been filled with a desire to possess your dominions. He does not deem it, however, expedient to go to war with you. A wise astrologer from Benares recently disclosed to him confidentially the fruits of his researches in the lore of the stars, and said that the benevolent Emperor who brought peace and plenty to the land of the sages was destined to extend his sway to the borders of the Eastern Ocean. When asked what the Padshah had to do on his part to help the fulfilment of the prophecy, he suggested our being sent to you with the epistles which we presented. He who is killed first is destined to displace you from the throne on being re-born, and he who dies next will become the minister. We are both his favourites, and he expects us to hand over the kingdom to him."

"May Tatagata† save me from the sin of putting two innocent persons to death! I am not

* The code of moral rules promulgated by Buddha

† A name of Buddha

a feudatory prince of the Mughal King and I am not therefore bound to carry out his orders. You men of the holy land, I declare you free to go where you like, but as long as you stay here, I shall make what reparation I can for the unkindness already shown to you."

Birbal and Tansen were the guests of the King of Burma for a few days, and, after some time, they started on their homeward journey. The king made such good provision for the journey that they reached India without much trouble.

Tansen was afraid of showing himself to the Padsha, whereas Birbal went to him forthwith. Akbar was at the time holding a durbar and Birbal related to him what befell himself and Tansen from the day they left Delhi until they came back.

Akbar asked the Muhammadan noblemen whether they were now convinced that Birbal was cleverer than Tansen.

"Aye, he is indeed clever in worldly wisdom," answered the most bigoted among the nobles, "but the idolater, unless he turns his face towards Mecca, does not deserve your favour."

"May Allah forbid that you should embroil me with my Hindu subjects! What right have you to dictate to others in religious matters? And what right have I? A man's religion is an affair between his own conscience and his God! Why should I claim to guide others before I myself am guided? Different religions are but different paths to the same goal!"

When the Mussalman's nobility were thus admonished, there was no further cavil among them.

XVI

THE USE OF INGENUITY

ONE day the Padsha asked Birbal what one should make use of in a fight. Birbal replied that one should make use of one's ingenuity.

"What a fool you are!" exclaimed the king, "Of what use is ingenuity before a weapon?" "Let us have a trial," rejoined Birbal. The very next day he had an opportunity of proving what he had said. A stout elephant got out of control and ran in his direction. When he saw the infuriated beast going towards him, having no means of protection, he was alarmed a little. But immediately, he picked up courage as he saw a dead dog lying close by. He took hold of the carcase and flung it on the face of the elephant. It was frightened, turned back and ran away. In the meanwhile, the Padsha arrived on the scene. Birbal narrated to him his encounter with the elephant and how he got out of it unscathed though unarmed. The Padsha expressed his admiration for Birbal's resourcefulness. "So it is clear," observed the latter, "how helpful ingenuity is in a fight."

XVII

THE PUNISHMENT OF THE GATE-KEEPERS

ONE day Raja Birbal came to the entrance of the Padsha's palace and wanted to go in. The chopdars (gate-keepers) refused to allow him to enter. Raja Birbal offered to them on his oath that he would give to one of the sentries half of what he might get as present from the

Emperor that day, and to the other, a fourth. Thereupon, the sentries allowed him to go in. He went to the Padsha and told him strange stories. The king was very much pleased with the stories and ordered Birbal to ask for a present. Birbal prayed that he might be given a thousand blows with a shoe. The Emperor wondered at the queer request, but thought there might be some *hulmat* in it and ordered one of his attendants to give them the blows in the manner which Raja Birbal himself might prescribe. The Raja went out and wanted one of the chopdars to be given half the number of blows, and the other a fourth. He then asked the attendant to keep the remaining fourth in reserve.

XVIII

A SENSIBLE PEPLY

AS Akbar was once very cross with Birbal, the latter left the kingdom and went away somewhere. The Emperor missed him in the court very much and was anxious to know where he had gone. He caused a communication to be issued from his court to the several feudatory princes of the Empire *that his oceans were going to be married and that he wanted their oceans to be present on the auspicious occasion.* The princes who received the message did not know what reply they were to send to the Padsha. At last, one prince in whose kingdom Birbal had taken refuge, sent the following reply: "We sent our oceans to the ceremony, let your wells receive them." When

* Skill contrivance, philosophy

Akbar got the answer, he knew that such a sensible reply could have emanated only from Birbal. He accordingly sent for Birbal, and became friendly with him once again.

XIX

THE THREE QUESTIONS

ONCE Khaja Sara, one of Akbar's favourite courtiers growing envious of Birbal, made up his mind to do him some harm, and induced the king to ask him the following three questions

- (1) Which is the centre of the earth ?
- (2) How many stars are there in the firmament ?
- (3) What is the exact number of men and women in the world ?

The Padsha sent for Birbal and asked him to answer the questions of Khaja Sara. Birbal at once planted a stick on the ground and said that the spot where it stood was the centre of the earth, but if Khaja Sara was not sure, he might measure the earth and satisfy himself. He sent for a ram, and, when it was brought, exclaimed, "There are as many stars in the sky as there are hairs on the body of this beast which Khaja Sara might count for himself at his leisure." As to the third question, he observed that it was not possible to give an exact answer, but that if all men and women were murdered, it would be easy to know their number exactly.

* It is interesting to know that even as early as in the days of Akbar, some at least were not ignorant of the fact that the water evaporating from the sea is of use in wells.

TALES OF KOMATI WIT & WISDOM

BY

MR C HAYAVADANA RAO, B.A., B.L.

[The Komatis of the Madras Presidency and the Feudatory States of Hyderabad and Mysore form a respectable class of people. They are well known as traders, money-lenders, shroffs and grocers. In Madras town they are the principal purchasers and distributors of every sort of imported articles. They are eminently successful in their hereditary calling and are even enterprising in their pursuit. There is a great deal of evidence to show that they were originally a homogeneous caste resident at Penulonda, in the present Guntur District, from which they seem to have spread in different directions in the beginning of the 11th century A.D. They are famous throughout Southern India for their wit and wisdom. People of all classes and ages recount and enjoy with great zest the stories told of them. Some of these are published in this series.]

I

MAKE HAY WHILE THE SUN SHINES

A BLIND Komati prayed to God Vishnu for the restoration of his eyesight. After many years of prayer, the beneficent Deity appeared before him and asked him what he wanted. "Oh, God! I want to see from above the seventh storey of my mansion, my great-grandsons playing in the streets and eating their cakes from golden vessels." Vishnu was astonished at the request of the blind man which combined riches, children, and the restoration of his eyesight in one demand and granted him all of them.

II

THE KOMATI AND THE SCORPION

A NUMBER of Komatis went to a temple one day. One of them put his right fore-finger into the navel of the Vinayaka (Belly God) at the gateway. A scorpion inside it stung him acutely. The Komati, however, put his finger to the nose, and smelling it, remarked "Oh! what a fine smell! not experienced the like of it during my life!" This induced another of the troop to put his finger in and he was also bit. He also pretended in the same way. All of them got stung in succession and then consoled each other with quiet hearts.

III

THE KOMATI AND HIS MOTHER-IN-LAW

A NEWLY married Komati once went to his mother-in-law's house and was received with great warmth there. Early next morning, the mother-in-law inquired of the young man whether he would either partake of a cold meal consisting of the previous night's cooked rice soaked in water, or eat cakes or wait for hot meals until mid-day when his father-in-law would return from his shop. "Yes," says the cunning son-in-law quietly, "I shall make a hearty meal of the cold rice, and be eating the cakes until father-in-law returns and it is time for hot meals"

IV

THE KOMATI AND THE BRAHMAN

AN old Komati killed a cat which had for long worried him by drinking the milk kept for his use. He felt sorry, however, that he ever had anything to do with the animal, for according to the Hindus, it is a very heinous sin even to beat a cat. The uneasy Komati accordingly called his Purohit (Brahman priest), asked him if anything could expiate the sin of a person who kills a cat. "Yes, if he makes a likeness of the animal in gold and makes a gift of it to a Brahman," says the Brahman. "Supposing," asks the Komati, "a man is too poor for that, what must he do instead"? "Give a silver one of course." "Suppose," says the Komati, "the man is poorer still." Well, a cat made of sugar will do," says the Brahman. "That will do for me," muttered the miserly Komati and called his wife, and, taking her aside, let her know of the whole matter and asked her to get things ready for his ceremonial purification. He then bathed and asked the Brahman to perform the ceremonies proper to the occasion. "Bring the golden cat," says the Brahman. "Go on with the sugar cat for the nonce," replied the Komati. "You are not so poor as to send me away with such a paltry gift," says the Brahman. "Nor am I so rich as to afford a golden one," replies the Komati. "Go on with the ceremony and we shall see," adds the Komati's wife. Too late to recede, the Brahman officiated and went home with the sugar cat and a rupee in addition through the kind intercession of the Komati's wife.

* According to Hindu ideas, it is sinful to molest in any manner the cat, and the taking of a likeness of that

V

THE KOMATI AND HIS POLITE RETORT

AN old Komati, who had been long keeping a shop, was one day met by an angry constituent of his who charged him with extortionate prices. "A vile race of men," burst forth the man, "nothing will curb your over-reaching character but the limits of your own avarice. A plague on you and all yours!" The patient Komati coolly asked, "Do you want dried grapes?" "Shall I let you have some good almonds?" "May I give you some (crystal) sugar? Do you want something sweet to the tongue?" The constituent cooled down a great deal and apologised for his bad temper and went home a sadder but wiser man.

VI

THE KOMATIS AND THE PANDYAN KING

ONCE upon a time, a Pandyan King had a new silver vessel of enormous size made for the use of the palace, and he superstitiously believed that its first contents should not be water. So, in view of this belief, he ordered his minister to publish abroad that the subjects of his kingdom animal in expiation for any misdeed done to it is held to be even more sinful. Respectable Brahmans all over South India refuse to have anything to do with such a gift as that.

The story is also related somewhat differently. At the end of the ceremony, another version goes, the Brahman and the Komati again quarrelled about the sugar cat. At its conclusion, the Komati put the sugar cat into his mouth and, swallowing it, said, "The sugar to me and the sin of killing the cat to you."

were to put into the vessel a *chembuful** of milk from each house. The frugal Komatis, hearing of this, thought within themselves "Oh! when the king has ordered such a large quantity and all will bring milk, it will be enough for us to take vessels containing water, as a little water poured into such a large quantity of milk will not change its colour. It will not be known that we poured in only water, and we shall pass off as having given our tribute. In this way, all the Komatis brought water instead of milk, and one did not inform the other of the trick he was about to play. Now, it so happened that the Komatis were the first to enter the palace while they thought that the people of other castes had come and gone. The vessel was placed behind a screen, so that no one might cast evil eye on it, and the Komatis were let in one by one to do honour to it. This they did in all haste, and each returned with great joy because of the success of his trick. Thus there was nothing but water in the vessel. Now it had been arranged that the king was to be the first to see the contents of his new vessel, and when he went to the room where the vessel was kept and saw its contents, he was thunder-struck to see only water. He became angry with the Komatis and directed his minister to punish them severely. The ready-witted Komatis, however, came forward with all presence of mind and cried out "Oh Gracious King! appease thy anger and kindly listen to what we have to say. We each brought a *chembuful* of water to find out how many *chembufuls* your Highness' precious vessel contained. Now that we have taken the measurement, we will forthwith fetch the quantity of milk required." The king was consoled to hear this and sent them away."

* *Chembu*, in Tamil and Telugu, means a small vessel

VII

THE KOMATI AND HIS LOST WEALTH

A RICH Komati's house was broken into by a gang of thieves, who carried away all that was of worth in it. At day-break, the Kotwal stepped into the house to make his usual inquiries. He asked the Komati what he had lost. "Lost!" ejaculated the Komati, "why, I lost nothing more than the old broom-stick behind the back of my house." "What?" rejoined the wondering Kotwal, "you have lost nothing? The whole city says you lost everything valuable you had possessed." "The city may, perhaps, know better than myself," said the Komati coolly, "but I say the thieves themselves must have subsequently repented why they did not choose a richer house" *.

VIII

THE KOMATI AND THE STAKE

ONCE upon a time, there lived a Komati who owned a big house. Being built of mud, the walls had patches which stood in need of repairs. The Komati ordered a set of workmen to repair his broken walls. During the night of the repairs, a thief came and, not knowing that the upper portion of the wall had just that morning been patched up, cut a hole in it and put his head in it, when, unfortunately for him,

* No Komati ever wishes that his real worth should be known. The phrase "Komatiguttu" (the secrecy of a Komati) is a common one. During pre-British days, when rich men were maltreated with the illegal seizure of their wealth by local chiefs and Nawabs, there was special temptation for perpetuating this phase of the Komati character.

the whole wall came down upon him and killed him. His comrade found a portion of his body hanging out of the wall. He reported the matter to the Kotwal, and, with his help, the matter was taken before the king for adjudication. The king, however, was a very stupid person. The Komati explained that the thief met his death providentially. But the king was not satisfied. He said that the Komati, being a stout man, was eminently fit for the stake, to which he ordered he should be driven. The Komati, however, was determined not to lose his life through the stupidity of the king. He contrived to bribe a couple of people, who were up to anything, to avert the fate to which he was doomed by the sentence of the king. In accordance with the advice tendered by the Komati to them, they appeared before the king on the morning of the day on which the sentence was to be executed. One of them said, "Oh! king! the man that will be impaled to-day will be born again as the king of this country. I want to be executed so that I may be born king." The other fellow also requested the king that he may be permitted to take the Komati's place that morning, so that he might be born king in his next birth. The foolish king would not brook the idea of the usurpation of his kingdom. "Fie upon you, rogues," he broke out, "I shall never consent to my throne being occupied by you fellows. Let the Komati be released. I shall myself proceed to the stake, and be reborn as the king of my own country." The stupid king thus killed himself on the stake, to which he had ordered the innocent Komati to be driven.

* This story will be found narrated in a somewhat different manner in the *Indian Antiquary*, vol. xx p. 78. The proverb *Kashucukku Eththa Komati* is usually explained by this tale.

IX

THE KOMATI AND THE HORSE OWNERS

A HINDU and a Mussalman claimed the ownership of the same horse. Each said that the animal was his and each cited the same Komati to depose to the fact of his ownership. The Hindu asked him if he did not know that the animal belonged to him for a number of years past. "Yes," says the Komati. The Mussalman asked him "Did you not see me riding the horse half way up the ghat road?" "Yes," answers the Komati. "Then, questions the Judge, "do you say that the horse belongs to both?" "I should rather think so. The forepart of it looks like that of the Mussalman and the hindpart like the Hindu's." The bewildered Judge confiscated the horse to the Nawab's stables.

X

THE KOMATI AND HIS HOARD

DURING the days of Nawab Satulla Khan,* a Komati kept a big grain shop at Aicot and made a large fortune for himself. Those were days when banks did not exist. So, the Komati stored away his money in pots which he buried, some under his bedstead and others near his hearth. When he became an old man, the thought flashed on his mind "How to

* Satulla Khan referred to here is the Sadat Ulla Khan of Karnatic History. He was Nawab from 1710 to 1732. His rule was a beneficent one and is still remembered as one of the happiest in South Indian History before the country passed into British hands.

leave my rupees and die?" He immediately called his wife and asked her to unearth the treasure pots and bring them before him. She brought the pots one by one, and arranged them in a line before him. The old man looked at them for a short time, and, heaving a long sigh, ordered his wife to pour down their contents on the ground. She obeyed. He then got up from his bed and asked her to arrange his bed over the money. He lay down on it and rolled from left to right, and then said to his wife "Oh! woman! I am dying, leaving my treasure behind. Waste it not by building *chattrams*, for they are but fit places for idlers and loafers. Dig as many tanks and ponds as you can with it and let human beings, animals, and birds drink from them and bless me for ever."

XI

THE KOMATI AND QUARRELSOME BEGGARS

TWO beggars, one a professional, and the other a person reduced to begging by famine,* entered the same house one after the other, and as they came out of it, their alms fell out, and they spoke angry words against each other. Then they came to blows. A Komati, who was standing beside them, was afterwards cited by both of them as a witness. When the Judge asked him who began the assault first, the Komati, unwilling to offend

* South Indian beggars are divided into two classes, *Panjathandi* and *Paramparaiyandi*. The former are famine-made beggars, and the latter are beggars from generation to generation. The former, a common saying goes, would rob a person of a child at a convenient opportunity, while the latter would jump into a well and pick up a child which had fallen into it by an accident and make it over to its parents.

either party (after all beggars!), deposed that he saw Rama and Thimma (the beggars) standing before each other and himself beside them, and as they were exchanging angry words, a dust storm blew and he shut his eyes, immediately after which the sound of blows reached his ears but, situated as he was, he could not now say whether Rama assaulted Thimma first or Thimma struck Rama first. The Judge left the beggars off with a warning.

XII

THE KOMATI AND THE ROBBERS

A HUNDRED years ago, the highways of Southern India were infested with robbers, who plundered the wayfarers that passed through them. A Komati and his wife went on a pilgrimage to Tirupati and were returning to their own place about 70 miles distant from it. While not far away from their own town, a gang of thieves, mistaking their carriage for that of the local Tahsildar* by the jingling bells tied to the necks of the bulls, dispersed far and wide, leaving only one behind them, who stood concealed near a huge tamarind tree to see if it was the Tahsildar or not. Finding from the hoarse voice of the Komati that the cart was not that of the Tahsildar, he stopped out and beckoned to the driver to stop. The driver stopped the cart. The thief came to the Komati and demanded from him his money bag. "Well, my man," said the Komati, "I am glad to see you here. How many are you in number? Hope all of you are doing well." "Yes," answered the robber, "we are nine and I want your bag." "Do you

* Revenue Officer of a portion of a district

mean to say that you don't care for the rest?" "Yes, I want your bag," rejoined the robber "That is hardly right Here, I have nine rupees and you can take your share (handing him one rupee), and as for the rest, ask them to come to my shop, and they shall have their shares" The stupid robber took the rupee and went and told his fraternity of what happened The gang marched in a body not long afterwards to the Komati's shop, where he handed them over to the Kotwal Thus were the deceivers deceived by the Komati

XIII

*THE KOMATI AND HIS GIFT COW**

A RICH Komati and his wife could never agree on the subject of charity The wife was never wearied of urging upon her husband the paramount necessity of doing some charitable act or other But the husband remained hard-hearted One day, however, the husband approached his wife, and said to her that he had made up his mind to make a pious gift Joyful that at last God gave good sense to her husband, she asked him what gift he intended to give "Our reddish-brown cow," said the husband This pleased the woman more than ever, for, the gift of a cow among Hindus is accounted one of the greatest of gifts that a person can make The cow, however, was an old one and was in a very weak state, which was unknown to his wife

* This story is narrated by Mr Srikantha Aiyar in the *Indian Antiquary* Vol xx

The Komati had determined to get rid of it in a pious manner, for, if it died while in his possession, he was to bear its burial charges himself and pay a fine as well to the king of the country, according to certain laws then in force. Accordingly, he was on the look-out for a Brahman to whom he could give the cow. As luck would have it, a Brahman with a copper bowl in his hand just then came in for a handful of alms. The Komati welcomed him with great respect, and told him of his intended gift. The Brahman gladly consented to accept the gift, and, unaware of the true condition of the animal, performed the requisite ceremonies, and the gift was formally made by the Komati. The animal was led off and pushed through the gateway of the house to be driven away by the Brahman; for the keeping of the animal after the gift is held sinful among the Hindus. The Brahman drove it a few hundred yards when the old animal lay down and died. The Kotwal turned up demanding the king's fine, but says the Komati "Oh! no, it is not my animal, ask the Brahman." The Brahman protested that he had it as gift just then from the Komati, and so the Komati must pay the fine. The Komati, however, would not hear the Brahman's protestations. Having taken the gift and led the animal off, he was liable, he said, under the law "I have no means to pay the fine," said the Brahman. "That does not matter," intercepted the Komati, "give the copper bowl, and that will do." The Brahman mendicant lost even that which he had, through the ingenuity of the Komati.

XIV

THE KOMATIS AND THE MILK-TAX

ONCE upon a time, a great king levied a tax upon milk, and all his subjects were sorely troubled on that account. The Komatis, all of whom had cows, found the tax specially inconvenient. They, therefore, hit upon a mode of getting the tax repealed. They bribed the minister and mastered strong before the king, and spoke of the oppressive nature of the tax. The king asked what their profit was from the milk. "A pie for a pie," said they to a man, and the king, thinking that persons who profited only to the extent of a pie ought not to be troubled, forthwith passed orders for the abolition of the tax.

XV

THE KOMATI COUPLE AND THE MAN ON THE BEAM OF THE POOF

JUST as a Komati couple entered their bed-room and lay down on their beds the husband perceived a thief perched quietly on one of the beams supporting the roof of the house. His wife being then with child he asked her in a low voice "What could do you think we shall be blessed with male or female?" A female child, says the wife, and I shall call her Seta." "Oh! No," says the husband, "it will be a male child and I shall call him Rama." They went on hotly discussing the probabilities for some time. At last, the husband cried out loudly as if to show his fixed determination I shall call my child 'ch' Poma'

oh! Rama!" "Now, the Komati was the headman of the village and knew that his Talavari" named Rama was sleeping on the varandah of the house. On hearing the voice of his master, he rapped at the door so continuously that a crowd gathered round him. Just then, the Komati came out of his bed-room. Bringing the assembled crowd into his bed room, he said "Look here, nothing happened betwixt us but a petty quarrel about the sex of the child that was to be born to us. I did no more than say that I thought it would be a male child and that I would call it Rama and Rama only. I did not beat her (pointing to his wife) though she raised a howl that would make others misunderstand. If you are not satisfied with what I have said, you may ask the gentleman on the beam of the roof, who has been an attentive witness to all that has happened." The "gentleman of the night" was summoned down and put in logs, preparatory to his being sent on to the police officer of the nearest town.

XVI

THE KOMATI AND HIS HEAVY LOAD

A KOMATI and his wife were returning home from a neighbouring village and, as they were approaching it, night set in. The darkness was so thick that further marching was out of question just then. So they decided to halt at a road-side village close to which they had come. They walked into it and entered into a decent looking structure, which happened to be the village headman's house and he put them up for the night. The cautious

* Village peon who acts as a constable.

Komati, wishing to guard himself and the jewels he carried with him against the molestations of the headman and his servants, tried to enter into conversation with another Komati who happened to live opposite to the house in which he himself had been lodged. In this, he succeeded, and after a few minutes, a big quarrel ensued between them both. The headman and other elders of the village tried to settle their differences but all to no purpose. The quarrel continued throughout the night. When it was dawn, the Komati took his leave. The whole village wondered at the manner in which he had contrived to keep wide awake all through the night—just to aid him in guarding his valuable jewels.

XVII

THE KOMATI'S SHORT CUT TO HEAVEN

A KOMATI, after his death, was taken before Yama by Chitra and Gupta. These are said to be the accountants of Yama who keep regular lists of the good and bad actions done by each human being. On turning over their accounts, the angels found that the Komati had not done even a single good act to deserve being sent to Heaven. But he had, the angels declared, off and on pointed by his forefinger to wayfarers the houses of gentlemen who would either feed or make money-presents to them. Yama, on hearing this, ordered that the Komati's hand must be made to touch Heaven and then the Komati was sent down to Hell.

Chitra and Gupta discovered an error of theirs in their account books. The error was that the

* The Hindu God of Death and Punishments

Komati should not have died when he did. So Yama directed them to send him back to the mortal world to live out his allotted span of life. On his return, the Komati hit upon a novel short cut to Heaven. He remembered well enough the reasons that induced Yama to order his hand being sent for a short while to Heaven. To insure his whole body being sent there, the next time he was called to account for his life's work in this world, he ever afterwards pointed the houses of charitable people by the shaking to right and left of his whole body.

THE SON-IN-LAW ABROAD & OTHER STORIES.

BY

MR P RAMACHANDRA ROW, B L

[Judged by the uniformly sorry figure he cuts in folk-lore, the new made son-in-law would seem to be about the most maligned member of Indian households, all sorts of oddities, awkwardness and stupidity being mercilessly piled on his devoted head. A good many of the popular tales turn upon his relations with the members of the bride's family. His initial visits to them are matters of absorbing interest, to which days and nights of anxious thought are devoted. Owing to a very natural desire on the part of the son-in-law to be thought well of in every respect, diverse innocent deceptions are resorted to, to make things look less ugly or more imposing than they are, while from the standpoint of the bride's family, the son-in-law is looked upon as "fair game" and is the object of much fun and practical joking, albeit his reception and entertainment are on a loving and right royal scale. In this character, he is the favourite hero of many a folk-tale, and supplies the place in the vernacular literature, of such types as have been immortalised in the Pickwickians of Dickens, Handy Andy of Samuel Lover, and Verdant Green of Albert Smith.]

I

HE SETS THE HOUSE ON FIRE

THE following story relates apparently to pre-historic times to an age, in short, when lamps and wicks were still novel luxuries, which had "just come out" and had not been brought into general use, at least, in rural tracts. A veritable Verdant Green of a son-in-law of this antiquated period and from up-country was on a visit to his wife's parents in the city. He gazed with silent wonder at the lights which were lit in the house after sun-down, and which rendered night as bright as day. He questioned his mischievous imp of a brother-in-law what those little glimmering things were and was banteringly answered that they were younglings of the sun which were procured with considerable difficulty from beyond the seas, and reared with great care. They were well worth the trouble, said he, seeing the immense benefit they conferred on their owners. The rash boy knew not that his brother-in-law was so dense that he would swallow as truth all that he had been told, and he also forgot that he was living in a thatched house, and failed to foresee the possible consequences of his mischievous joke. The son-in-law was so enamoured of these "solar younglings," that he desired to possess himself of one, at any cost. Accordingly, when everybody had retired to rest and the house was perfectly quiet and buried in deep slumber, he got out of his bed, walked on tiptoe to the solitary lamp in the room, and taking a burning wick, concealed it in the roof of the house, thinking to carry it home, unperceived, on the following day. Needless to say, the whole house was soon in flames, and all the inmates were

aroused Their first thought was to rescue out of the burning pile as much as possible all that was valuable, and while every soul in the house was thus busily occupied, the son-in-law also began poking here and there into the burning thatch overhead Being questioned what it might be that he was looking for, he naively replied that he had hidden a "solar youngling" in the roof, and that was what he was looking for He thus became an object of contempt, and was anathematized as the idiotic author of the conflagration.

II

HE BELABOURS HIS WIFE

IT happened once that an absent-minded son-in-law, who had a peculiar habit of forgetting the names of things, arrived at his mother-in-law's house alone on his return from a journey, and unaccompanied by his wife He was, as usual, made much of, and feasted right royally Several curious confections, cakes, pies, and puddings were prepared and served up for his special delectation. Of all these tempting viands, he appreciated best a kind of sandwich, a culinary delicacy he had not tasted before and thinking to make his wife cook this preparation at home, he asked for and learnt its name Lest his memory should play him false ere he reached home, he further resolved, never to let the name go out of his mind, but kept continually repeating and muttering "sandwich" all the way home Arriving at a narrow stream that lay across the road, he saw a number of boys jumping clear across it, with the unmeaning cry of "Hatheri Pacha" No sooner did this reach the son-in-law's ears, than it dislodged the word "sandwich" clear out of his

head, and he took up in its place the cry of "Hatheri Pacha", and went home with it on his lips.

Arrived at his house, he told his wife what a savoury and nice "Hatheri Pacha" had been cooked for him by her mother and called upon her forthwith to prepare one. Of course, there was no such thing as "Hatheri Pacha" in the culinary vocabulary of any language, and the wife professed her ignorance of what he meant, and begged him to explain. The son-in-law thought he was being made a fool of by the very wife of his bosom, and began to beat her, upon which she pointed to the swellings on her body and asked her irate lord whether it was right to beat her into "sandwiches" all over. "Ab!" said our hero, "sandwiches it is. That is the very thing I wish you to cook for me."

III

HE DROWNS HIS MOTHER-IN-LAW

A newly-married farmer who had no brains, was returning home from the fields one hot afternoon. He had been reaping and had his sickle suspended from his waist-string. He found the blade of the sickle hot owing to long exposure to the sun, and his stupid brain at once concluded that his sickle had been seized with fever, and he went about howling for a remedy. A kind *Samanitan*, who was passing by, and who gauged the idiot's profound ignorance, took him to the river-side and made him cool the sickle in the water. On taking it up again, he, of course, found it perfectly cool, and thanking his friend for the kind lesson, went

away deeply pondering over it. Arrived at home, he learnt from his wife that his mother-in-law lay in a burning fever and that something should be done at once. He bethought him of the wonderful "water cure" of the sickle, and he carried the poor dying woman to the well and threw her plump down into it. With the rude shock of the descent, and of the cold plunge, the old lady died. She lay with upturned face and a ghastly grin. The son-in-law concluded that his treatment had been attended with marvellous success, and that the old lady was actually smiling in joy at her remarkable recovery, "Grin mother-in-law mine," exclaimed he, "well may you grin, now that the fever has left you"!

IV

THE ADVENTURES OF A MYOPIC SON-IN-LAW

A SON-IN-LAW whose defective vision had escaped notice at the time of his marriage, was on his first visit to his wife's family for the Dipavali feast. He could see things well enough in broad daylight, the defect in his eye being of that kind which is designated "twilight blindness," that is to say, he was blind only during the dark hours. It grew dusk just as he approached the house of his father-in-law and being no longer able to find his way with certainty, and too bashful to enquire of others, he stumbled into the grain-pit attached to the house—a hollow where grain is usually stored in rural parts. As he was groping helplessly at the bottom, and making frantic efforts to reach the surface, he was espied by his brother-in-law

who kindly came to his aid, and helped him out of the pit. In explanation of his strange antics, he said that he was measuring the depth of the grain-pit to compare it with his own at home. He next encountered a sporting ram which was loosely tied to a pillar of the house, and having fallen foul of it in his progress into the house, received a staggering blow on his knee-cap from its well-trained head, which caused it to smart with pain. The ram had iron rings on his horns and bells round its neck which made a clinking noise as it butted him, and the son-in-law had made a mental note of this fact. As the family was assembled for the festive supper, the mother-in-law, who had, in honour of the occasion, decked herself with bracelets, rings and anklets, came round serving ghee, as is usual on such occasions. As she moved from guest to guest, the ornaments she wore produced a sound not unlike that produced by the fighting ram that had hurt the hero. He, poor soul, thinking that the ram had broken loose began to hit out right and left with his clenched fists, with the result that his mother-in-law received a smart blow on the nose, and was compelled to beat a hasty and somewhat undignified retreat, in order to repair damages. Nor was this all. The crowning feat was still to come later on.

When he had retired for the night, the son-in-law confided to his wife the cause of all his troubles, and begged her to arrange some method whereby he might find the way out of, and into, the bed-room without guidance during the night, should he have occasion to go out. The wife fetched a rope of straw, and fastening one end of it to a pillar in the yard, tied the other end to a leg of the cot. The blind husband found the rope useful when he went out, but on

his return journey, the rope, which had been, meanwhile, eaten away by the ram, was no longer available as a guide. He was, therefore, thrown upon his own devices, and unfortunately came across his mother-in-law, whose bed-room he reached instead of his own. The lady raised an alarm, whereupon lights were fetched, and the hero was discovered in a singular plight. His ready wit, however, did not desert him, and the son-in-law scored again, for on being asked for an explanation of his behaviour, he at once replied that he had come to prostrate himself at his mother-in-law's feet, and to beg her pardon for his rude conduct at supper time.

V

HE WEEPS OVER HANDWRITING

A son-in-law, whose pursuit of study had been suddenly arrested at so early a stage that he knew only one or two letters of the alphabet as they were written big on black-board and slate, chanced to be on a visit to his wife's house—when both the head of the family and his eldest son were absent on business in a distant part of the country. For several days, no letters had arrived from the absentees, and the family was in a state of great anxiety in regard to their health and welfare—the more so as an epidemic, of a virulent type was reported to be raging in that part of the country whither their business had called them.

One morning, after a long interval of silence, the postman's welcome voice was heard at the door, and the letter received was put into the hands of the son-in-law, who alone was likely to be able to read and explain the contents.

No sooner did the son-in-law open the letter, and bestow a glance at the handwriting inside, than he burst forth crying, and, at sight of this, the rest of the family, concluding that the letter conveyed tidings of some evil that had happened to the absentees, followed suit—and the whole house was soon in an uproar. The neighbours were attracted by this general lamentation, until at last one of them, to make sure what the commotion was about, snatched the letter out of the son-in-law's hand, and on reading it, found to his surprise, that it conveyed news of the welfare of the absentees, of the successful termination of their business, and the probability of their early return. There was absolutely nothing in it to warrant any grief. The matter was explained to the women-folk of the house, who referred to the still weeping son-in-law as the cause of their grief, while the latter to whom no amount of persuasion could bring any comfort, pointed to the initial "A" of the missive. He bemoaned its cruel fate, and exclaimed, between his sobs "Has it come to this, my old friend? How they must have starved and stinted you to make you turn so small as almost to be invisible. When I first made your acquaintance at school, you were as big as the whole slate upon which I wrote you. To think that they should have so ill-treated you that you have grown smaller than a fly!" It thus turned out that the son-in-law could not even spell words, but only had a dim conception of the size of letters in large hand copy while his intellect was found to be equally poor, as it led him to fancy that the attenuated nature of the letter in the missive was due to its having been deprived of needful nourishment. And one and all blessed the son-in-law that things were no worse.

VI

THE CONVERSATIONAL SCHEME THAT FAILED

A son-in-law had grown stone-deaf since his last visit to his wife's parents. He wished to pay a visit to his bed-ridden father-in-law, and, at the same time, to conceal his own infirmity. He accordingly hit upon a novel plan, and drew up a programme of his proposed dialogue with the patient, consisting of set questions, the probable replies to which could be guessed with tolerable certainty. "I shall begin," said the son-in-law to himself, "by asking the old gentleman how he feels. He will, of course, say that he is feeling a little better, upon which I shall observe that I am delighted to hear it. I will then ask him what medicine he is taking, and on getting the old man's reply, say that it is the best thing for him. I shall finally enquire who his medical attendant is, and on the old man's naming some one, I will say he could not have made a better choice."

• Having thus mentally arranged this imaginary conversation, he arrived at his destination, and at once began his enquiries. But he did not take into account that while man proposes one way, God disposes of things another way, and that it is the unexpected which always happens. To the first question, as to how he was feeling, the old man, who was decidedly growing more and more peevish, answered that he was as good as dead. The son-in-law did not, of course, catch the words, but presuming that the old gentleman was reporting an improvement, at once observed that he was delighted to hear it, a remark the apparent heartlessness of which irritated the patient beyond endurance. He then enquired

about the medicine prescribed, to which the irate patient replied that he was taking "brick-bats," and the son-in-law at once set about praising the excellent properties of so rare a medicine than which, said he, nothing was more suitable to the case. By this time, the patience of the ailing man had been well-nigh exhausted, but he had yet one more ordeal to undergo. "Who is your medical attendant?" quoth the son-in-law and the answer was that it was Yama himself the God of Death, to whose care he had committed himself. The son-in-law expressed his rapturous delight at so wise a choice, and added that, in the circumstances, he could hardly entertain any doubt as to the welcome result that was sure to follow. This was too much for the patient who naturally flew into such a frenzy of rage that he even got up, and kicked his tormenting visitor downstairs. Thus it happened that a programme so masterly in its conception proved an utter failure in execution.

VII

A VISIT IN BORROWED CLOTHES

A son-in-law, on his initial visit to his wife's family for the Pongal feast after his marriage, chose for his companion during his visit a person of a rather dense understanding. It so happened that, owing to the poverty of his own wardrobe, the son-in-law had to hire a smart turban for the occasion from the village washerman. To prevent, however, the secret of its leaking out through the stupidity of his friend, he deemed it prudent to admonish and caution his companion that he was on no account

to divulge to their relatives the fact that the grand turban the son-in-law was wearing had been hired for the occasion. This lesson was so well^{*} hammered into his head that he could hardly say anything else by way of reply to questions with which the relatives greeted the party about the welfare and prosperity of the family of their son-in-law. This strange allusion, throughout the companion's talk, to the son-in-law's turban, and his ceaseless asseveration, in season and out of season, that he could personally vouch for the fact that the turban was his own absolute property, created a suspicion in the minds of the hosts who, after watching their guests closely, soon arrived at definite conclusions. The son-in-law returned home utterly discomfited.

VIII

"UNDOUBTEDLY"

A certain wandering Gipsy owned a pet parrot whom he had taught to repeat the word "undoubtedly" in answer to anything said within its hearing. By way of obtaining for his pet bird credit for a marvellous power of divination, he used to carry the bird on his arm to some selected spot where he had previously taken care to bury some money in secret, and there, amidst a crowd of spectators, put it the questions "Shall I find money here?" The parrot would, of course, articulate "undoubtedly"—the sole word he had been taught, and the wily Gipsy would then delve for the buried money, and exhibit it, with an air of triumph, to the spectators standing open-mouthed with astonishment. This made many of them green with envy, at the thought of the untold millions within reach of his owner.

One of these, whose simplicity made him an easy dupe to this transparent dodge, began to cast longing eyes on the bird, and hoping to enrich himself by the acquisition of this veritable treasure of a parrot, he became its proud possessor having paid down a price that would have been a king's ransom. No sooner did the fool arrive home with the fruit of his folly, than he at once put the parrot to the test, and began to ply the bird with questions as he had seen its former owner do. The usual answer being returned, he dug up each spot in succession, but found no treasure anywhere. It was, at last, borne in upon his mind that he had been made a dupe of by the wandering Gipsy, and he cried out in the bitterness of his disappointment, "What a born idiot am I to be gulled by such a transparent trick!" "Undoubtedly" came the parrot's apt reply, the sole instance in which its words proved true, and the purchaser, it is superfluous to say, became a sadder but a wiser man.

IX

SUMMONING THE MAGICIAN

THE owner of a house who was about to retire to rest for the night, found a thief concealed in the structure of the roof.

On the pretence of assuring himself if all his chests had been locked up, the owner set about fumbling among his boxes one after the other, when he, all on a sudden withdrew his hand with a sharp shriek screaming out that he had been stung by a scorpion. He thereupon set up a loud howl as if in agonizing pain, and this brought to the spot a neighbour who was noted for his effective spells against the scorpion bite. The

latter then began his incantations, keeping time, all the while, with a bunch of margosa twigs, which he brandished, time and again, over the affected spot. After an interval, he questioned the sufferer if the pain had been allayed, to which the house-owner replied that the scorpion's venom, which had shot up his arm, had indeed come down, "but not so," added he, the worthy stranger who is perched uncomfortably high among the rafters". The neighbour looked up, discovered the thief, and helped to have him secured.

X

FEIGNING MADNESS

A thief lay in hiding, one night, in a bean-shed of a tradesman's house. The latter, however, scented him out, as he went into the yard to wash his hands and mouth, after supper, but fearing to raise an alarm without assistance near at hand, he bade his wife fetch a potful of water. When his wife fetched what he wanted, he began to rinse his mouth slowly, spitting out the gargle, on each occasion, in a well-directed squirt at the thief that lay there in hiding. Again, he bade his wife fetch another potful, which he dealt with in the same way. A third and a fourth potful were thus disposed of, when the wife, surprised at this strange proceeding, questioned him about it. The husband, in reply, treated her to a similar mouthful, when the woman, concluding that her spouse had become demented, ran and fetched a large number of their neighbours to come and help quiet him.

The neighbours questioned him upon his inexplicable conduct, when the supposed lunatic thus addressed them — "Listen, friends and neighbours! It is like this. I married this woman, when

she was five years old, loaded her with costly ornaments and brought her up in the lap of luxury, gratifying all her desires without stint or measure, and yet because, forsooth, I spat one mouthful of water at her, she could not brook it, but must needs set it down to my having gone mad, and summon you to come and bind me. On the other hand, do but cast a glance at that patient gentleman behind the bean-shed (indicating the concealed thief) who, though he owes me not a single benefit, has yet contained his patience under circumstances which rendered his situation intolerable, having received the contents of four large pots of water, which I had gargled on him. Ask him, friends, if at all you doubt my words."

The neighbours looked in the direction indicated, when they saw the thief dripping all over, and in direful plight. They at once saw through the cunning device of feigned madness which, they perceived, was a mere ruse to summon their assistance in order to apprehend the thief, and they accordingly captured the thief.

XI

A SUDDEN OUTBURST OF FRIENDSHIP

ONE evening, as a petty shopkeeper, about to lock up, was engaged in counting a pile of coppers he had gained during the day, a friend dropped in for a talk. While the shopkeeper was telling the coins, a sharp gust of wind blew out the light, when he became suspicious, and, fearing that his friend might annex a handful of the money, under cover of darkness, at once grasped his friend with both his hands and enlarging on the intimate friendship that had

subsisted between the two, ever since their childhood, begged his friend to take an oath that their intimacy should continue unbroken to the last moment of their lives. "A light would soon be forthcoming" said he, as he shouted out to his wife to fetch one, and tightened his grip over his friend's arms at the same time, "and I want you to swear to our friendship in its sacred presence." So saying, he held his friend's arms fast, and did not relax his hold until the light arrived, and the friend took the oath required, by raising and bringing down his own right hand on the right palm of his friend.

XII

WINKING FOR DEAR LIFE

ONE afternoon, an idle youth of the money-lending fraternity, who was rather vain of his personal graces and greatly fancied himself when the fair sex was near him, was sauntering along the street which fronted the royal palace, when he espied the Queen, gazing steadily through a window which commanded the thoroughfare. The idle youth who, as already observed, was a vain fellow, imagined that the Queen was looking at him, and ventured to give her a wink in acknowledgement of what he fondly fancied, was an amorous glance directed at him.

The Queen remarking this, felt indignant at the insult, and told the Sovereign of it during the night, adding that she could single out the fellow who had insulted her, if all the money-lenders of the city were summoned to appear at the palace on the morrow. Accordingly, the King caused a proclamation to be made throughout the capital,

and summoned all adult male members of this profession to muster at the palace gates by 3 P.M. on pain of severe penalties. On hearing this, the fraternity concerned held a secret conclave, and enquired if any member of their profession had contrived to give offence to Royalty, when it leaked out, to their surprise and consternation, that the vain youth had cast a glance on the Queen on the previous evening. The assembly then pondered deeply over the matter, and came to the conclusion that his only safety lay in winking, vigorously and incessantly, with both eyes, until they had shown themselves to the King, and returned home in safety.

When they appeared at the palace, the Queen instantly spotted out and indicated the culprit. The King sent for and questioned him sternly, upon his rude behaviour of the previous evening, but all the reply he got was a series of interminable winks, accompanied by a most guileless look. The King then turned to the assembled crowd for an explanation of this strange phenomenon, and was respectfully informed that the lad was liable to occasional fits of winking, and that when once the fit came on, it lasted for three days at least. This sufficed to hoodwink the King, and thus did the foolish youth escape from imminent peril of his life.

XIII

THE BURGLAR DISCOVERED BY HIS OWN PRECAUTION

A burglar learning that the police were in hot pursuit of him, and thinking of "any port in a storm," hid himself inside a green store in his own house, after giving strict injunction to his son—a young fellow of some half-a-dozen summers

—that if any one were to question him about his whereabouts, he was not to reveal his place of concealment. The lad agreed, and no sooner had the father disappeared than the police put in their appearance, and enquired for "Papa." "Papa," said the young hopeful, "is not hiding in the grain store. You may be certain of it." The strangeness of the answer caused the policemen to explore the store where they found their quarry huddled together in a heap at the bottom.

XIV

TIDINGS OF THE BATTLE

WHEN it was reported to a certain king that his enemy's army was marching on his capital, he sent his own commander-in-chief to meet and disperse the foe ere he approached the precincts of the city.

An itinerant vendor of sundry stores followed the king's troops hoping to make a considerable profit by vending provisions to the king's soldiers, but finding that the latter had been disastrously routed by the enemy, and that the remnant of the king's army had turned tail and fled back in confusion, he began to retrace his steps citywards, as fast as his legs could carry him. The king, who was watching from the balcony of his palace, to see if any one arrived from the scene of the battle that could give him tidings of the encounter, espied the itinerant vendor running home in hot haste. He summoned him and asked him how the battle went. "Ours, Sire! is the victory," said the other, whose native wit induced him to disguise the unwelcome tidings of the defeat.

Pressed to state the grounds of his^d information, his reply was eminently characteristic, for his cunning answer was "though the enemy is putting forth every effort to overtake our soldiers, the latter are outrunning and distancing them. The race, therefore, is ours for certain" The king could scarcely help admiring the man's ready wit, deeply vexed though he was at the defeat of his troops

XV

PAYING A FRIEND IN HIS OWN COIN

A BAZAAR man of slender means who was engaged in a petty trade, and was desirous of adding to his small capital, obtained a loan of 1,000 pagodas from ten sowcars, but after a time, it occurred to him that it would prove a shorter road to riches if he could hoodwink his creditors

He accordingly secreted all his property, and started a rumour that he had been robbed of his all at a dacoity in his house, and had been reduced to absolute penury

One of his creditors, the hardest, the shrewdest, and the most unscrupulous of the lot, who did not fully believe the story of the dacoity, but suspected that there were still some few pickings to be got off the tradesman's bones, called on him in a friendly way, and offered to put him up to a dodge by following which he could effectually get rid of all his creditors, provided he himself was paid his dues. The debtor eagerly closed with this offer, upon which the creditor instructed him to laugh a maniacal laugh, and cry out "Bay! Bay!" to all his other creditors, by way of reply to anything they might ask

This advice was implicitly followed, and the debtor even went to the extent of treating the adviser himself (when he came to claim the reward of his services) in the same manner, for he greeted him with an idiotic stare and a burst of frenzied laughter, followed by the unintelligible cry of "Bay! Bay!" The friend contained his patience, as best as he could, for a few minutes, and then, pulling a long face, said "Bay-Bay has done well in the case of the others, but it was I that gave you the hint!" "Hint or no hint," stammered out the debtor, "it is Bay-Bay all round. Bay-Bay to you, and Bay-Bay to all!"

XVI

AN HONEST THIEF, A KING AND HIS MINISTER

A HARDENED thief, who was addicted to every conceivable vice, sought absolution from his priest. The latter asked him to give up his bad ways, but the thief would not. The priest thereupon proposed to the thief that he should at least give up the sin of lying, to which the thief agreed.

That very night, the thief set out on his business to steal into the royal palace and take whatever he could lay hands on in the shape of valuables. The king, who was loitering about the premises in disguise, encountered the thief, and questioned him whither he was bound, to which the thief, having vowed to speak the truth, replied that he proposed to rob the king that night. The king asked if he also might accompany and help him, and the thief agreed. Arrived at the palace, the thief posted the king outside as a sentinel to watch, while he went

in He found three valuable rubies lying loose on the king's table, but as three would be an odd number to divide among two, he left one alone and brought away two, of which he offered the king one, and took the other for his share. The king examined his table after he entered the palace, but found that the thief had left one of the rubies on the table. Next morning, the king summoned his minister and telling him that thieves appeared to have entered the palace overnight, asked him to see what was missing. The minister, who found the single ruby, pocketed it and reported that the rubies left on the royal table had *all* been made away with by the thieves. The king concluded at once that the thief was a more honest man than his own minister, and dismissing the latter, rewarded the thief for his truthfulness.

XVII

THE BRAHMACHARIN THAT UPSET A BOAT

A DEEP river, which ran across a public highway, used to be crossed in a ferry boat. When the boat was quite full, on one of its trips, and was about to start for the opposite bank, it was boarded by a woman with a bundle of brooms for sale, a snake charmer with a poisonous serpent in a box, and a monkey dancer with his monkey. They were soon followed by a Brahmacharin who begged hard to be taken in. He, also, was admitted by the greedy ferryman, in spite of the unanimous protests of the other passengers, who knew that a Brahmacharin had decided leanings towards mischief. To prevent his playing any pranks, the boatman secured the Brahmin youth whose hands

and feet were tied, but as the boat reached mid stream, the Brahmacharin could no longer contain his patience, but pulling a few out of the broom bundle by the teeth, prodded the monkey with them. The monkey jumped up at this, and alighted plump on the snake box, the lid of which he opened. Thereupon the sleeping snake was aroused and raised its hood in a threatening manner. The passengers nearest the reptile got alarmed and in order to escape its venomous circle they leant in a body, towards the opposite side of the boat. Its equilibrium thus disturbed, the boat at once capsized, and the passengers were one and all drowned. Herein was verified the saying that for pure mischief, a single Brahmacharin is equal to a hundred monkeys.

XVIII

LEOPOLD TO HIS TRAMP

A VILLAGER washerman owned a donkey and a watch dog. One night, a number of thieves entered the house, but the dog, who used to bark and to awaken his master, remained silent. The donkey remonstrated with the dog upon its silence, but was told by the dog in reply, that though he had, again and again, saved his master's property by barking in time, the former had never shown his appreciation of the invaluable services rendered by him, which he had taken as a matter of course. "Let the thieves have it their own way this time" quoth the dog, "for I shall not raise my voice again to warn him". The donkey, who was less hard of heart, decided to supply the dog's place, and began to bray, upon which the washerman was aroused, and the thieves concealed themselves. The washerman,

finding nothing amiss, went up to the donkey, and gave him a good beating for having unnecessarily disturbed his rest, after which he again retired to sleep. The thieves returned and robbed the washerman of all there was in the house. The dog, who had remained a silent spectator of all this, then turned to the donkey and exclaimed, "See how our master rewards fidelity to his interests, and behold also the mischief of people meddling in business which concerneth them not. Had you minded your own affairs, you had escaped a sore skin to night!"

NEW INDIAN TALES

BY

MR C HAYAVADANA RAU, B.A., B.L.

[To an Englishman sojourning or staying in India, a knowledge of its peoples is highly necessary. Nothing is likely to give him a truer insight into the character of the people of this country than the tales that are current among them. The present is only a random selection. A great many of these are distinctly amusing, while some at least of them appear to have their foundations on fact. For obvious reasons, no attempt is made in these pages to probe the historical origins of the latter. Judging the stories from the standpoint of the listener, one should think that some of them are just those that would make even the most morose enjoy a hearty laugh. It is a common belief that Indians are a philosophical race with little of that hilarity that is so marked a feature of the peoples of the West. These tales, however, give the lie direct to that oft-repeated opinion. Whatever their philosophy, they are a race that can make and enjoy a joke.]

I

THE TALE OF TWO CUPS

A POOR man, with a number of children, was daily entreated by his wife to try his luck in some other country. He at last yielded to her importunities and resolved upon a long tour. Overjoyed at his determination, his wife, as became a thoughtful woman, prepared for him an excellent dish of curd-and-rice and, handing it to him, asked him to partake of it on the bank of a river and sleep, when necessary, under the cool shade of a big tree. With his dish in his hand, the poor man trudged on some miles during the hottest part of the day. At last, he arrived near a river, seeing which his wife's counsel came to his mind. He looked round for a tree and having espied a grove not far away, he moved with difficulty to it. He suspended his dish from one of the branches of a tree and lay down to take some rest. Unaccustomed to such travel, he soon fell asleep and knew not what took place thereafter. It was evening, and Parvati and Paramesvar, the twin-deities fond of travel, happened just then to pass that way. The soft breeze carried the sweet smell of the dish to them, and Parvati, eager to know what it was, suggested they might descend to the earth below and see wherefrom came the pleasing smell. Paramesvar assented and both came down from their Vimanat† and saw the poor traveller sound asleep, while his food was wafted gently by the breeze. Parvati suggested that they might partake of the dish, the more so as they were very much exhausted. Paramesvar

* A favourite dish with Hindus of all classes.

† Heavenly aero-plane

agreeing, they emptied its contents and made a hearty repast. They then replaced the bronze cup of the traveller with a golden cup of magical powers, and resumed their aerial flight. The traveller was awakened soon after, and, being hungry, thought of the food hanging from the tree. He washed himself in the river and taking the dish to its banks, he spread a plantain leaf and took the dish to his leaf. Untying it, he found *not* his own bronze cup but the golden one left by the deities. "Lo! what has happened? Whose work is this? Is this, after all, a dream?" So exclaiming, he took the cup, and looking at it eagerly on all sides, he placed it upside down on his own leaf when he found his platter full of the choicest cakes. "This is a gift of the gods," muttered he to himself, and soon finishing his meal, he ran homewards with the golden cup. He narrated the story of the exchange to his wife, who felt overjoyed at the prospect now open to them. To mark their thankfulness to the benignant deities, they stood a dinner to all the people in their village, who were not a little astonished at the magical cup and its properties of satisfying all the wishes of their possessors.

Envious of their prosperity, the wife of the adjoining house-owner worried her husband to go out on a travel and bring a similar cup. She also gave him a cup of curd-and-rice, and he lay down under the shade of a tree as his neighbour had done, after he had gone a good distance. A Brahma-Rakshasa* and his wife chanced to pass that way, and attracted by the smell, they descended to the earth and partaking of the contents of the cup, they replaced the bronze cup with a leaden cup. After a while, the traveller woke up and noticing the change in the cup, he

* A Hindu hobgoblin

at once went back to his wife. Highly pleased, she invited all the villagers to a feast. The platters being spread, the cup was placed upside down on the first of them. Immediately after that, two hobgoblins rose up and cut off the nose of the man who sat at the head of the platter and went on repeating their cruel work, until all ended in confusion and the people fled to their homes.

Envy brings punishment in its train.

II

THE TALE OF TWO IDIOTS

WHEN a big drum was beaten, two idiots thought that there was a man inside the drum who made the noise it produced. When the drummer went out to collect some dry sticks to kindle a fire over which he might heat his drum, the two idiots approached and closely examined it. One of them tore one end of it and put his hand in, while the other did the same at the other end. Each, touching the other's hand inside, thought he had caught the man making the noise. As they stood quarrelling there, the drummer came and, seeing what they had done with his drum, severely thrashed both of them and turned them out.

III

THE THIEF CAUGHT RED-HANDED

A MAN had trained a parrot with great care and had taught it how to speak. Whenever he called out "Ram! Ram! where are you?" it would reply "Here I am." One day, another man entered his house with a number of other people, and at a convenient opportunity opened the cage and transferred the parrot from it into his own pocket. At that moment, the owner came up to exhibit his bird and cried out, "Ram! Ram! where are you?" "Here am I, here am I," cried out the bird from the pocket of the man, to whom its owner wanted to exhibit the bird. The man was found out and made over to the Kotwal for punishment according to law.

A thief lays his own snare

IV

THE KING AND THE OLD MAN

AN old man was once busy ploughing his field, when the king of the country, who was an idler, happened to ride that way. Attracted by the bent-down figure of the old man, he drew up his reins and called out to him. He quickly ran to the king and, prostrating himself before him, begged to know what his Sovereign Lord demanded of him. Curious to know his age, the king asked him if he had known his father, the late king. "Yes," said he, "I had known him

* Amongst Hindus, it is customary to avoid a direct question as to age.

and his father, my Lord's grandfather and . . .” “You are then over seventy-five years of age,” interrupted the king. “May be,” quietly replied the old man, “but my Lord will permit me to say that I am but seven years now” “Ah! Ah! what is it you say? seven years, only seven years?” ejaculated the king in surprise. “So it is, my Lord,” replied the old man, “counting only the number of years I have lived for the good of others. Of what benefit is it to others to live a life of slothfulness and ease?” The king was deeply touched by the wise words of the old man, and, thanking him, rode off. From that day onwards, the king was a different man altogether.

THE RAYA AND APPAJI

BY

MR T M. SUNDARAM AIYAR

In 1509 Krishna Deva Raya succeeded to the rich dominions of his father who had added to his Vyayanagar Provinces the districts of Madura, Tanjore, Trichy and Tinnevely. The relations between the Raya and his Minister Appaji were far more intimate than those of Ruler and Minister. Appaji was looked upon by Krishna Deva as his confidential friend and boon companion. Many stories are extant of the difficulties and perilous situations in which the Raya found himself and from which he was invariably extricated by the wit of his trusty friend and adviser. This collection contains some of these instructive and amusing stories.

I

HOW APPAJI BECAME THE PRIME MINISTER

THE Raya had occasion to send for the rulers of all the tributary States under his sway for consultation on some political problems. On the appointed day all of them presented themselves except one who sent his minister Appaji as his representative. As each vassal paid his homage to the mighty potentate, the Raya made kind enquiries regarding the country of each of them. When Appaji's turn came, he was presented, and the Raya asked him his name. He submitted that he was called Appaji and that he came to represent his master. The Raya, though offended at the absence of his vassal, put on a calm face over it and directed Appaji to send for his master. And in obedience to the mandate Appaji requested his master to come and remain at a village some four miles from the capital. Meanwhile the Raya in one of his rides happened in passing by a butcher's shop to see a butcher slaying a sheep, and quickly turning to Appaji he reminded him of his order to send for his master. Appaji wrote to his master and required him to go back at once to his capital, which he did. Some days after, while the Raya was in a gay mood, he asked Appaji if his master had been sent for and Appaji gave him a negative reply. The Raya demanded the reason for his negligence, and Appaji said he would give it out if the Raya would promise that no harm would be done to his master. The Raya granted his request and Appaji explained that his master had really come, but before he could pay homage to his majesty he had to be warned to go, because the Raya was mightily displeased with him. On being questioned how

Appaji had made out that, he related the incident of the scene in the butcher's shop and stated that, he concluded therefrom that the Raya had a great mind to deal with his master as the butcher did with the sheep and so he tried to save his master. On hearing this, the Raya was astonished at Appaji's sagacity and fidelity and appointed him Prime Minister at his own Court.

II

STANDARD OF COMFORT AND POSITION IN LIFE

ON a certain night, it rained heavily. At day-break when the rain ceased, the Raya and his Minister went for a morning stroll through the fields outside the town to inspect the floods, and admire the beauty and grandeur of the picturesque scenery around. While they were passing by a sheep-fold, they saw a shepherd soundly sleeping on a bed of rough stones, while his hair was dangling in the water that was flowing under him. Seeing this, the Raya exclaimed "Is the man alive or dead?" Appaji said that the man was not dead, but enjoyed sweet sleep. The Raya doubted if one could sleep so soundly on such a bed of stones in the cold weather, with water washing his hair. Appaji explained that it all depended upon a man's position in life. The Raya, with a view to verify the statement, had the shepherd removed to his palace, and gradually raised him to a high position in the State, by which he was enabled to enjoy all kinds of princely comforts. One day the Raya caused the shepherd to walk along wet ground. The same day he caught cold and began to ail from fever. Now that the Raya was fully convinced of the truth of the maxim enunciated by Appaji, he had the shepherd cured by his durbar physician and commended Appaji's shrewdness.

III

*HOW TO PUNISH ONE THAT KICKED AND SPAT
ON THE KING*

APPAJI, the Prime Minister of the Raya, now under the patronage of the benign ruler, grew powerful in the State and the Queen the Raya's wife, feeling jealous of his power and influence with the King wanted the Raya to elevate one of her relations to the post. When the Raya expressed doubts as to the man's attainments, she asserted that he possessed qualifications far superior to those of Appaji. Of this, the King was not convinced, but he promised to test both of them, and the Queen was quite pleased. The very day on which the promise was made while the King was playing with his children in the harem, his little boy kicked him and howled before him and played several other tricks with him. The next morning, the Raya sent for the man recommended by the Queen and enquired of him what punishment was to be inflicted upon one that kicked the King and howled in his presence. The man replied without hesitation that the audacious rebel should have his legs severed immediately and his mouth stopped with molten lead being poured into it. He dismissed the man and sending for Appaji he put the identical question to him. Appaji burst into a fit of laughter and said that a gold anklet should immediately adorn the legs which kicked His Highness and the mouth should be sealed with a kiss from the royal lips. The Raya thus explained to his Queen that the person who committed the offence for which punishment was sought was her own child and asked her which of the punishments she would like to inflict on her boy. The Queen though convinced of the superiority of Appaji's wisdom, still replied that

ere test was not sufficient. The Raya, confident of the comparative merits of the candidates, promised her some more opportunities for testing the powers of the Queen's nominee.

IV

HOW APPAJI GROWS CABBAGES

THE fame of Appaji spread far and wide and reached even the ears of the great Delhi Padshah. Growing desirous of testing Appaji's keen insight, his power of observation, and shrewdness of wisdom, he indented on the Raya for some more cabbages. The Raya was non-plussed and consulted Appaji. Appaji came to the Raya's rescue and said that they could be found and hatched home devising plans on the way. He filled a country cart with earth and sowed seeds of cabbages in it. The seeds took root and the cabbages grew in plenty. A week before the appointed time, he advised the Raya to send the cart to the Sultan. The Padshah, on receipt of the many cabbages, was much pleased with Appaji's shrewdness and henceforth had a high regard for him.

V

HOW APPAJI RESCUES THE RAYA

THE Sultan of Delhi had often sent his soldiers against the Raya to defeat him, but all his attempts had proved unsuccessful. He now determined to take the Raya captive by stratagem, as his efforts to conquer him in open battle had been ineffectual, so long as Appaji lent him

a helping hand. Hence he sent a thousand well-armed cavaliers in the guise of horse dealers with instructions to capture the Raya's person. Arriving at the capital, they announced themselves as merchants from Northern India, and that they came there to solicit the Raya's favour and patronage. The Raya promised to patronize them, and, one evening, went to their camp to inspect the horses. The leader of the group informed His Highness that each horse was worth a thousand mohurs, and that, as all of them were equally good and trained alike, His Highness might choose any one of them and make a trial ride on it while the other horsemen would keep pace with him. The Raya, acquiescing, mounted on a horse and spurred it to high speed, the other riders followed the Raya. When they reached the fourth milestone from the city, the disguised emissaries of the Sultan captured the person of the Raya and carried him off a prisoner to the Delhi Padsha's presence*. Appaji soon came to know of the Raya's fate, and, regretting the king's indiscretion in relying on the words of the bogus traders, cast about in his mind for a device to rescue the Raya from the clutches of the Sultan. At last, he hit upon a plan.

Appaji went in disguise to Delhi and sent word to his compeers to fit out a vessel laden with valuable precious stones and start for the nearest sea-port from the Sultan's capital. His

* The incidents of this story seem to have a historical basis, although wrongly attributed to the Raya. We find a similar story now current among the South Indian populace, which relates how Pratapa Rudra, the King of Warangal (Woragallu in Telugu), was carried off a prisoner to Delhi in 1323 A.D., and how his minister, Yagandhar, effected the king's escape by having recourse to a similar stratagem. (Vide Pandit Venkataraya Sastri's *Pratapa Rudriya Natakam* in Telugu.)

friends fitted out a ship laden with diamonds and emeralds, and presenting themselves before the Sultan, made a display of their wares. The Sultan was struck with the beauty of the dazzling diamonds and offered a high price for them. The merchants demanded a price which was considerably more than what they were really worth, and suggested that the Raya who was an expert in valuing diamonds, might be consulted. The merchants invited the Padsha to pay a visit to their ship, where, in the show-room, he could conveniently examine the precious stones and make his own selection out of them. The next day, the Sultan paid a visit to their ship, taking with him the captive Raya. At a word from Appaji who had entered the ship, it began to move and soon reached the coast skirting the Raya's dominions, and the Raya took the Sultan and his attendants to his palace where they remained as the Raya's state-guests for some time. The Sultan now discovered how he fell unwarily into the trap set for him by Appaji, and could not but express his admiration (much to his chagrin) of the shrewdness of the Raya's minister. He assured the Raya that he would no longer interfere with his affairs and then took leave of the king and started for Delhi.

VI

THE IDOLS DIFFERENTIATED

THE Delhi Padsha,* not satisfied with testing Appaji's ability once, had recourse to another device. He had three idols of identical size and

*The Padshas of Delhi, referred to in these tales, seem to have been the weak Muhammadan rulers of the Sayyid and Lodi dynasties, whom Krishna Deva Raya formally acknowledged as his nominal suzerain.

shape made by a skilful sculptor and sent them to the Raya, requiring him to examine them and report which of them was good, which bad and which indifferent. The Raya received the Emperor's message and had it read with due deference before his council, everyone in the council carefully scrutinized the idols, but all were quite alike in size, shape and beauty, and they could not point out any difference in them. At last, Appaji was called in and consulted. He requested the Raya to allow him a day's time. The next day, he submitted to the Raya that he had differentiated the idols by distinguishing subtle marks thereon. The Raya, who was all admiration for Appaji's sagacity, requested him to explain his discovery. He then told the king that on a minute inspection of the idols, he found that each of them had a small hole in one of their ears. Concluding that the hole should be the clue for distinguishing them, he inserted a thin bit of wire into the hole in each of them. In one, the wire came out by the mouth, in another, it came out by the other ear, and in the third, it did not. He accordingly classified them as follows. The last one represented a man who would keep to himself what he had heard from others and was therefore the best, the idol which allowed the wire to pass through its other ear represented the man who would forget at once what he took from others, and therefore typified the indifferent nature of the man, and the idol which gave the wire a free passage through the mouth was the worst as it represented the garrulous man who made it his business to sow broadcast all what he had heard from others. After explaining the details of his scrutiny, Appaji asked the Raya to return the idols with their natures stamped on them. The Raya's joy knew no bounds, and under

Appaji's instructions, he sent them at once to the Padsha of Delhi. The Sultan, on receiving the idols, was much struck with the minister's keen powers of observation and deduction

VII

*HOW THE ARMY UNDER THE SULTAN'S
WIZIR WAS ROUTED*

ON a stormy day, a rough and haughty Mussalman was sheltering himself from the rain on the verandah of a house, when there came and sat by his side a consumptive old man. The latter frequently coughed, and the Mussalman could not tolerate it. He warned the old man to cease from coughing, but the coughing continued. Growing very wrath, the Mussalman drew out his sword and chopped off the head of the old man. Incensed at this open cold-blooded murder, the neighbours caught hold of the Mussalman and took him to the Raya for condign punishment. The Raya asked him why he had cut off the old man's head. The Muhammadan replied undauntedly, "Sire, the old man persisted in coughing in spite of my repeated warnings, and, unable to put up with it, I quickly despatched him to the other world." On hearing his words, the Raya could not forbear a laugh at the man's irritable temper and foolhardiness, and consulted Appaji as to the punishment to be awarded. Appaji chuckled to himself and suggested that no heavier punishment need be meted out to him than mere surveillance and sumptuous feeding with a daily supply of two seers of meat, a seer of ghee and other luxuries, and added that his services would be in requisition some day. The Raya, who had complete confidence in Appaji's wisdom, directed that the instructions should be strictly followed. Sometime after, the Delhi Padsha proclaimed in his durbar, one day,

that the Raya, though a vassal, was very slow in obeying his orders and quite unpunctual in paying his tribute, and this, the Padsha thought, was due to Appaji, his adviser. He therefore asked if any of his courtiers would vanquish the Raya by any means, fair or foul. One of them stood up and offered his services. The Sultan sent him with a large and mighty army under his command. The courtier encamped in the vicinity of the Raya's capital, and sent an ambassador to the Raya's Court to announce his arrival. The Raya found himself in great perplexity and informed Appaji that the Sultan's minister had come with an overwhelming army, and that this particular Vizier was dangerously artful and cruel in his ways. The Raya feared that his arrival boded him no good and asked Appaji to give him his best advice. Appaji at once sent for the rude Mussalman who was being fattened at the Raya's expense, and requested the king to send through him a humble epistle to appease the irate minister. In it he referred to his own insignificance as compared with the Sultan, and submitted that he would readily pay the tribute whenever demanded. The Muhammadan took the letter to the minister and handed it to him. The minister read the letter, and blaming himself for leading such a great army against a coward like the Raya, spat on the floor to show his contempt for the Raya's abject submission. The Mussalman took it to be an insult offered to himself, and drew out the sword from the sheath, and in a flash, the Vizier was cut into two. The soldiers, who were close by, dealt with the rude Muhammadan likewise. When the commander was killed, disorder arose in the army's ranks, and it fled in all directions. The Raya came to know of the fate of the Sultan's army and was very much pleased at Appaji's sagacity.

Appaji burst into a fit of laughter and stated the methods adopted by him, which should have caused a change in the opinion of the barber. He then convinced the Raya of the truth of the maxim that one judges the world by one's own standard. The Raya could not but admire the judicious instincts of his minister, and, as desired by Appaji, the barber was sent for, and his life's savings were returned to him.

IX

"CAPE KILLS A MAN"

ONE day, as the Raya was returning with Appaji from his evening stroll, he observed a well-built young man who was pushing back an elephant that was just returning from the river after its bath. The man stood in front of the animal and easily pushed it back by the tusk. The Raya was much surprised to see him display his great physical strength and asked Appaji if it was possible for any man to develop such powers. Appaji readily replied that such sportive tendencies and extraordinary powers were due to the man's leading a life free from cares and anxieties. But the Raya, in spite of his faith in Appaji's words, wanted him to prove his statement. And Appaji assured him that he would show the king that the same young man would be unable to push back the elephant when he happened to meet it next time. Appaji sent for the youth's mother, a widow, from whom he learnt that, as he was her only son, she had not given him any cause for anxiety in the way of earning a livelihood, and that she took special care to conceal from him all her worries. When Appaji heard this, he told her that it

was not conducive to his welfare to allow him to idle away his time and lead an easy life. He recommended that she should gradually make him understand his responsibilities. To gain this end he suggested that she should tell him when he came for his evening meal, that the supply of rice had run short, and that, unless he procured some rice, he would go without food from next day. The innocent widow thanked Appaji for his advice and when she asked her son to procure some rice next day, he was taken aback and had to think out ways and means for procuring it. That evening, as the youth was loafing and idling in the street all the while casting about for a solution of the rice problem, the Raya observed him and stood in a corner to see how he would behave towards the elephant. As usual, the elephant returned just after sunset, and the youth, who used to sport with the biggest of the elephants, rushed towards it. The elephant at first charged at him, but it soon felt his powers unequal, and at once it whirled its trunk around him, and put him out of its way. The Raya who perceived this sudden change in the youth, asked Appaji how it was possible for the young man to have lost all his strength in a single day. "My Lord," said Appaji, with a smile "it is all care and anxiety, a care worn man sows despair and reaps infirmities." He then related the incident as he had managed it. The Raya sent for the widow to corroborate the statements of Appaji, and he extolled him for his ready wit and imagination.

X

A QUESTION OF INTERPRETATION

WHILE the Raya and Appaji were out on a hunt one morning, they saw a man ploughing his field and three maidens closely watching him. One of them said that it was fit for the face, another pronounced it fit for the mouth, and the third deemed it fit for the offspring. The Raya was unable to make anything out of the remarks of the women and asked Appaji what these expressions meant. Appaji thought over the matter and said that the maidens were remarking about the soil and that the first woman, when she pointed out that it was fit for the face, merely wanted to convey the idea that the soil was suited for the cultivation of turmeric,* the second woman, who observed that it was fit for the mouth, wanted to suggest that the soil was better suited for the cultivation of betel leaves†, the last woman, who decided that the soil was fit for offspring, had in mind the rearing of young cocoanut trees. The Raya at once sent for the three maidens and asked them what they meant. When he found Appaji's explanation confirmed by them, he praised him for his shrewdness in understanding things apparently meaningless.

* The turmeric is used by Hindi ladies as a toilet for the face.

† The betel leaves are considered a delicacy by the Hindus and the Malays and they are chewed after every meal with areca nut parings and chunam.

XI

PRaise IN DISGUISE

ONCE there came from the southern country to the Raya's Court three girls proficient in *Bharata Sutta* dancing and *Savita Shastri* music. They made an impressive display of their skill before the Raya. He was much pleased with their proficiency and gave them suitable presents, and the women in expressing their thanks called the King thus:—The first girl "Hail! King thy heart is like the root and stem, Hail!" The second girl "Hail to thee! Oh King, it is thorny and misshapen." The third "Hail, King! it is rugged and rocky." The Raya understood the praise that lay beneath these apparently uncomplimentary words, and finding in them a fit subject for testing the capacity of the man whose cause was so strongly espoused by the Queen, he summoned him to his presence, and asked him what punishment he could recommend to the women who, in open Court, addressed the King with the words above referred to. And the man, without the least hesitation, replied that, for their impudence, they deserved to be driven out of the country. The Raya dismissed the man and sent for Appaji and asked him his opinion of the matter. Appaji replied smiling "Oh mighty Ruler, the women, should, in my opinion, be amply rewarded for their sagacity in estimating your character so correctly." But the Raya, however, wanted Appaji to explain how he construed the women's remarks as praise. He said "My Lord, the first woman merely told you that she appreciated your disposition and found it as sweet as the root and stem of the sugar-cane, the second expressed the same idea better and compared the

sweetness of your character to the honey in the jack-fruit, the best of all fruits, though externally thoruy and misshapen and the third compared your nature to the sweet sugar-candy which is rocky and rugged in appearance. In fact, what they said is really praise showered upon you." The Rava became overjoyed and turning aside to his Queen, asked her what she thought of her *protege's* capacity as compared with that of Appaji. As is generally the case with women, she persisted that they should be put to mere tests

XII

THE LEARNED FOOLS

THERE came to the Raya's darbar, five Brahmin scholars, who had devoted all their lifetime to some special subjects in which they had attained great proficiency. The group consisted of a logician, a grammarian, a musician, an astrologer and a physician. They displayed their mastery in their respective subjects, and the Raya was much pleased with them. But Appaji expressed that he had doubts if they were equally conversant with worldly matters as they were with their subjects. To test them, Appaji suggested that they might be asked to cook their meal and enjoy a hearty dinner before they were sent away with suitable presents. Accordingly, they were shown a spacious kitchen where they were to prepare their meal, and Appaji sent a servant to keep watch over their movements. The logician went to the bazaar to purchase ghee, and on his way home, a doubt as to whether the ghee or the cup supported the other crossed his mind. In spite of all his endeavours

on finding out the *pros* and *cons*, he could not come to any conclusion, and as he just entered his lodgings, the idea of deciding the question by a direct experiment suggested itself to him, and he overturned the cup with its contents. As the ghee spilt on the floor, he concluded that the cup supported the contents and went in thoroughly satisfied with the experiment. The grammarian, who volunteered to procure curds, could not tolerate the curd-woman's unnecessary lengthening of the final vowel sound in the Tamil word *Thayin-o* against all the rules of phonetics, and falling out with her, he returned to his quarters, a wiser, but a sadder man. The musician, who assumed the role of the cook, squatted before the oven, and as the rice in the pot began to boil, he commenced beating time to the sound of the boiling rice. But the boiling rice had its own way, and the musician soon lost his temper and broke the pot to pieces. The astrologer, who was asked to prepare leaf dishes for holding the food served to each, just climbed a banyan tree, *Ficus Indica*, when, to his misfortune, he heard a lizard produce the sound "click, click*" above his head. He was half-way then, and taking it to mean a bad omen, he began to get down from the tree, when, again he heard another lizard's "click" from the opposite direction. At this stage, the astrologer could neither climb up the tree nor get down from it, and, at last, finding it was becoming late, returned home a sorry being. The physician, who undertook to buy vegetables,

* The Hindus consider the interpretation of omens, viz., the ticking of a lizard, the howling of a jackal, the braying of an ass as a branch of the science known as astrology. Even to this day, the belief in omens has a strong hold on the credulity of the people, especially in villages and country towns.

began to consider the therapeutic value of every vegetable in the stall and finally discarding them all, left the market without buying any vegetables. It was noon by the time all the five scholars met together again, without any signs whatever even of a probability of any sort of preparation for their food. They cursed the day and sadly bemoaned their lot. Appaji, who was informed by his servant of the comic scene at the kitchen, sent word to them to appear before the Raya. The scholars came, starving and dejected. The Raya could not but pity the unhappy condition of the scholars and advising them to be better informed in matters directly concerning practical life, sent them away to their native country, with some presents.

XIII

A CASE OF IDENTITY

THE Padsha of Delhi issued orders to the Raya that his Prime Minister should be immediately sent to his presence. Before Appaji arrived at Delhi, the Padsha had recourse to a stratagem by which he wanted to mislead him. He ordered one of his courtiers to put on the Emperor's garb and take his seat on the throne, while the Sultan, disguising himself as the Vizier, joined the ranks of the courtiers. The Raya's minister, Appaji, was announced and was admitted to the Sultan's durbar. Appaji just stood before the Sultan who was in the guise of a courtier and made his obeisance. The Sultan was not a little surprised and could not but express his wonder at Appaji's shrewdness and asked him how he made him out as the Padsha. Appaji said, that since the eyes of all those present

in the darbar were directed towards the Padsha, he understood that a game to mislead him was being played. The Sultan was immensely pleased at Appaji's explanation and sent him home with royal presents. The Sultan henceforth determined that he should not interfere with the Raya's internal affairs, convinced, as he was, of the fact that so long as the services of Appaji were entertained by the Raya, he would always be defeated in his attempts to circumvent the Raya.

FOLK-LORE OF THE TELUGUS

BY

MR. G. R. SUBRAMIAH PANTULLU

[Though folk lore appears to be a very much neglected branch of study, it takes the place of history, by throwing a world of light on the manners, customs and religious and social conditions of the people whose folk lore it is. Indian folk lore presents very often a strange blending of the natural and the supernatural, which exerts a peculiar influence on the listener. This has taken possession of the Telugu mind to a very great extent, so much so that the ordinary Telugu person fully believes that there can be no gloomier form of infidelity than that which questions the reality of the supernatural.]

I

THE KING AND THE WRESTLER

WHILE King Nandana was wielding sway over Telugu land, a wrestler approached him and said that he had toiled hard and learnt fencing and similar arts, could fight with wild animals and could even walk with a huge mountain on his head.

The King heard him and thought that such a giant would be serviceable to him, and engaged his services for a hundred pagodas a month .

There was a huge mountain near the city infested with wild beasts which were causing great havoc among the people The King, therefore, sent for the wrestler and said — "You declared, you know, that you could carry a mountain on your shoulders A mountain there is in the neighbourhood, which is the cause of much suffering to the people Take it away to a distant spot"

The wrestler was all obedience, and on the next day at dawn, the King took him with his ministers, priests, and a retinue of soldiers, to the vicinity of the mountain The wrestler girded up his waist-band, tied his turban and stood ready The King saw him and called upon him to take the mountain on his head and go

The wrestler replied — "Sir, I made you understand that I could carry the mountain on my head, but I did not say that I could lift it up Kindly command your soldiers, therefore, to tear the mountain up and place it on my head, and I will then carry it to whatever place you may command me."

II

THE OLD WOMAN, THE COCK AND THE HEARTH

IN the village of Pennagarai, on the road from Conjeeveram to Wandiwash, there lived an old woman who had a fire place in her house and a cock Day after day at early morn, when the first streaks of light were visible, the cock would crow All the villagers would then rise,

procure fire at her house and go their ways. This state of affairs had continued for a long time, till the old dame took it into her head to imagine that the day dawned because her cock crew, that all the villagers cooked and ate their food because they obtained fire from her house. She wanted to see how the day could dawn and how the villagers would manage to cook their food if she quitted the village. So she went, unknown to anybody in the village, to a wood far off with her cock and her cooking store and sat down there. The next morrow, all the villagers arose, came as usual to the old woman's house, but not finding her there, thought she must have gone somewhere on some errand, fetched fire from some other place and cooked their food and ate it. In the meantime, the old woman remained in the wood until dusk, when a villager happened to pass by her. She called out to him and said — "I was not in the village this morning has it dawned there? Have the people procured fire? Have they cooked and eaten their food?"

He laughed and said — "Do you think that the whole world depends entirely on your cock and your fire? Why do you remain here? Get up and go home"

III

THE SAGACIOUS MINISTER

SULTAN Mahmud used to wage war abroad and to oppress his people at home. His whole dominion lay ruined and desolate. Upon this, his minister thought that it was imperative to contrive some stratagem by which the king would become a good ruler. Accordingly, whenever he spoke to the king, he used to relate how

he had once been a pupil of a certain *Sanyasin* and had learnt the language of birds

One day, as the king and the minister were returning from the hunt, two owls were sitting upon a tree hooting at each other. The king, hearing the noise, called upon his minister to tell him what the birds were conversing about. The premier listened for a short time, as though he really understood the conversation of the owls, and then told the king that they were not words fit for him to hear. The king, however, insisted upon hearing the words.

The Vizier, therefore, represented the conversation to have been as follows — "One of the owls has a son and the other a daughter, and the two parent birds are negotiating a marriage between their children. The one said to the other — "Then, you will give your daughter to my son but will you give him fifty ruined villages?" To which the other replied — "While our Sultan Mahmud, by the grace of the Almighty, rules so happily, can there be a dearth of ruined villages? You only asked me for a paltry fifty, I will give you five hundred."

When the Sultan heard this, he was very much grieved at heart. So he at once ordered the rebuilding of all the ruined villages in his realm, and made his subjects happy.

IV

THE LION AND THE JACKAL

IN the Dandaka forest was a lion which was in the habit of attacking and killing all the beasts therein. To rid themselves of the constant fear in which they were, all the other

animals proposed to supply the lion with one animal a day, if it would not attack them any longer. This promise was agreed to and kept up for some time. After a time, it fell to the lot of a fox to be sent to the lion, who, by no means, relishing the idea of being devoured, walked slowly along, thinking all the while of some plan by which he would be able to put an end to the lion and save his own life. The lion, not finding the animal at the proper moment, was very much enraged and insisted upon an explanation for the delay. The fox rejoined — "Sir, another fox was sent under my charge by all the animals of the forest as an offering to you, but, on the road, I met another lion, who took away your meal and asked me to tell you of it."

The lion ordered the fox to take him instantly to the place of his enemy. The cunning fox took the lion to the side of a well, and saying that the other lion was in it, begged him to take him in his arms that he might also have a peep into the well. When the lion saw the reflection of himself in the water with the fox in his arms, he instantly came to the conclusion that he was looking on his enemy, and having dropped the fox, made a furious leap into the well and immediately perished.

V

THE INEVITABILITY OF THE LAW OF KARMA

THERE was a weaver in the Karnataka, Haimantaka by name, who wove both coarse cloth and fine linen. But as his profits were very meagre, he was not able to make both ends meet. Adjacent to his abode was another of the same-

profession, Dhimanta, who lived happily on the large income he derived by weaving coarse rough fabric. One day, Haimantaka approached his wife and complained to her as follows —

"My talents are unknown to any one in the place," said he, "I propose quitting my home for another place with the object of amassing as much wealth as possible."

His wife rejoined — "Of what avail is your going to a distant place? You will get only as much as it has fallen to your lot to earn."

Despite her remonstrances, he quitted his abode, went to and settled for a time in a far-off country, wove such clothes as were in demand in the place, made money by his profession and wended his way homewards. On the way, he stayed at an inn and, securing his treasure in a corner, went to rest for the night. Thieves rushed into the inn and purloined every item of property that was there, so that when he rose up the next morning, he found to his great disappointment and distress, that he had nothing left. He thus learnt, very dearly indeed, the truth of what his wife had told him. And feeling very despondent, he lived upon such small gains as he could make at home. The moral of this is unlucky anywhere, unlucky everywhere!

VI

DURBUDDHI AND SUBUDDHI

AT Avantī lived two merchants, Durbuddhi and Subuddhi by name. These two men went to a foreign country, amassed much wealth there and returned and buried unknown to anybody the whole of their riches under a huge tamarind tree.

Not long after, Durbuddhi went clandestinely to the spot, purloined the whole treasure and carried it away to his house. A few days after this, both of them went together to the tree and found that the treasure had been removed. Upon this, Durbuddhi accused the other of having secreted the treasure, dragged him before a court of justice and lodged a complaint against him. The Judge promised to go into the case the next day.

Meanwhile, Durbuddhi took his father along with him, placed him in the hollow of the tree, and instructed him to answer favourably (to himself) the Judge's queries on the morrow. The next day the Judge, with a view to conduct a local examination, came with his attendants near the tree and asked who had taken away the money. To the intense astonishment of the by-standers, the man inside the tree accused Subuddhi of having secreted the money. But the Judge was not a man to be taken in easily. After a little reflection, he caused some straw to be brought, stuffed the hollow of the tree with it and set fire to it. The man inside was about to be suffocated and howled for his life. The Judge, perceiving the deceit that Durbuddhi had played, came to the conclusion that it was he who had walked away with the money. He caused, therefore, all the money to be brought and given to Subuddhi.

(VII)

PURITY OF THOUGHT

AT Vizagapatam lived two friends, one of whom used to perform with punctiliousness the religious rites enjoined on him and, proceeding to the temple, he used to remain there for a long

time The other passed his time in frivolous conversation with boon companions The former, though a frequenter of the temple, hankered after worldly enjoyments. The latter was, however, ashamed of his life and was extremely sorry that he did not follow the virtuous ways of his friend

This went on for a long time and then they both breathed their last But the first one was taken to Hell and the other to Heaven The sage Naraḍa seeing the fate of these two, approached the Almighty and said "O God' Hell has fallen to the lot of the man who spent his days in your temple, while you have given Heaven and final beatitude to the fellow who wasted his time frivolously. If you, who are all-powerful, perpetrate such barefaced injustice, who in the world will adore you?"

The Almighty smiled on hearing these words and said that he gave redemption to that man who had centred his mind on virtue, while the other was sent to hell who frequented the temple but desired to enjoy the delights of the world Upon the purity of our mind depends the good or evil state we attain after death

VIII

THE SELECTION OF A RULEP

DWIJAKIRTI, King of Chōlamandala, had three sons As he was old and no longer capable of guiding the destinies of his realm, he resolved to give his kingdom to any of his sons who might be fit to rule

In order, therefore, to ascertain their capacity, he sent for his eldest son first and asked him

what he most desired. He replied that he was most anxious to have around him the best logicians, grammarians, rhetoricians and other men of science, and to pass his time in the study of the *Ramayana*, *Mahabharata* and other sacred books. The king thereupon gave him a few villages for his maintenance and told him to go there and do according to his wishes.

He then sent for his second son and asked him what he desired most. He replied "I am anxious to visit sacred shrines." The king thereupon gave him the money necessary and sent him on his pilgrimage.

He then sent for his third son and asked him what his desire was. He replied "To acquire a kingdom, levy a great army, protect the people, make the provinces fruitful and thus acquire great fame are the objects of my ambition."

The king was much gratified at these words, and, thinking that he was the fittest person to rule the kingdom, made over the charge of his kingdom to him. The son assumed the reins of government, treated his people with justice and generosity and consequently, his people flourished.

IX

RESOURCEFULNESS

A CERTAIN king of the Karnatak had a beautiful flower garden in which he spent most of his leisure hours. He had a minister, whose son was in the habit of going daily to the garden and purloining the flowers. The king, missing a number of them day after day, told the gardeners in charge to be on the alert to

apprehend the thief and bring him before him. They accordingly kept watch, caught the minister's son red-handed, put him into a conveyance along with the stolen flowers and took him to the king's palace. The minister was at the time standing at the gate. Those who were near him told him what had happened, how his son had stolen the flowers, how he was caught by the gardener in the very act of stealing them, and how he was being conveyed before the king. They wanted the minister to save his son from infamy. The minister thereupon loudly answered "It is of no consequence, if he has a mouth, he will live." The son, hearing this, quickly perceived the exact import of his father's words, and immediately ate all the flowers. When they brought him before the king, he asked the boy why he had stolen the flowers. To which the boy said that they brought him there unjustly, for he only went to see the garden, but did not steal any flower. As there were no flowers found with him, the king believed this and let him free.

X

TRUTH WILL COME TO LIGHT

IN days long gone by, there lived a wealthy merchant at Delhi. One of his servants stole some of the property in the house and absconded the next day. The merchant thereupon sent out his men to search for the thief, but all was of no avail. Not long after, the merchant chanced to go to another city on some business. He there saw the servant, who, had committed the theft, walking in the street. He seized him and taxed him with having stolen the property and absconded, but the fellow seized the merchant by the waist cloth and clamorously demanded his property, saying that the merchant had been his

servant, that he had stolen valuable things from his house, that he had been looking out for him for many a day and had now found him. The two went before a magistrate and represented their grievances. The magistrate reflected a little and ordered them both to put their heads through a window, and calling the executioner, he said to him "Whoever is the servant, cut off his head" Now it came to pass that the fellow who had committed the theft being really the servant, and hearing that they were going to cut off the head of the servant, withdrew it, while the merchant never removed his head from the window. On this, the magistrate discerning that the man who withdrew his head was really the culprit, punished him severely.

XI

AN HONEST SERVANT

THERE was a king at Anantapur, Kunthibhoja by name. While he was holding his *dubai*, seated on his throne and surrounded by a host of pundits, ministers and others, a Kshatriya came and bowed and said that he would honestly serve the king if the king engaged him as his servant. The king appointed him as his personal attendant. From the very first, he kept a vigilant watch over the king's palace. One midnight, the king heard the cries of a woman, called his attendant and asked him who it was that cried. The Kshatriya attendant said that he, too had heard the same cries for ten days past, but could not say where they came from, but that he would make enquiries, should the king command him to do so. The king asked him to enquire into the matter, and when the servant departed, he followed him *incognito* to see

whither he went. He went outside the town and there saw a woman with dishevelled hair, seated near the temple of Durga, crying at the top of her voice. He asked her who she was and why she was crying. She replied that she was the tutelary Goddess of Kunthibhoja's kingdom and that as the king was destined to breathe his last in two or three days more, she was crying—for who would protect her then? The king's attendant then asked her if there were any means by which the king's life could be saved. She said that, if the attendant's son were offered as a sacrifice to Durga, the king would live for a very long time. He thereupon went home and informed his son of what he had heard. The son asked him to perform the sacrifice instantly and save the life of the king, for, by the king, a good many people lived. The attendant then took his son to the temple, drew his sword from the scabbard and was about to slay him, when Durga appeared before them and said that she was so pleased with his conduct that she would confer on him any boon he might ask. He requested Durga to spare the life of king Kunthibhoja and to bless him with long life and prosperity. Durga gave him the boon sought for and disappeared. The servant, overcome with joy, sent his son home and went to the king's palace. The king, who had witnessed *recogito* everything that had happened, quietly reached his palace, went upstairs and, pretended to be asleep. The attendant went to the king and said that a woman who had had a quarrel with her husband was weeping bitterly, and that he had pacified her and sent her home. The king admired the self-effacement of his servant and raised him to the rank of the Commander-in-Chief of his forces.

XII

THE HARES AND THE ELEPHANTS

IN days long gone by, a drought devastated the whole of the southern country, and there was not a drop of water in pond, lake, well or tank. The elephants, very much troubled with thirst, went in search of a place, where they could quench their thirst to their heart's content, and found a tank called Chandrapushkarani. As the tank was full to the brim, they quenched their thirst there, and also found a habitation in the woods adjacent, till the whole country was again green with verdure. But the path leading to the woods was full of hares, many of whom were killed under their heavy footsteps. The hares, seeing the calamity that had befallen them, and in sorrow that they had been greatly reduced in numbers, met at a certain spot to devise means for sending the elephants away to a distant spot. One of them said — "Why fear the elephants? I have devised means to get rid of them."

On a certain moon-light night, he climbed and sat on an adjacent mountain-top and said to the elephants who came by, as usual, to drink from the tank — "O, ye elephants, I have been deputed by Chandra (the moon), whose tank it is, to inform you that this tank has been made for him under his orders. That is the reason why it goes by the name of Chandrapushkarani (*lit* the moon's tank). He comes here every night and dallies with his wives. For some time past, he has been interrupted in his pastime by your advent. He is, therefore, very angry with you. Quit the tank instantly; otherwise, he told me he would destroy you all ere dawn. If you want to see whether he is angry or not, just look into the tank and you will be satisfied."

The elephants were wonder-struck and seeing the reflection of the moon, agitated by the wind, in the water, mistook it for his anger with them, bowed to the moon, requested him to excuse them as they had come there in innocence, and desired the hare to intercede with the moon on their behalf. The elephants, thereupon, quitted the place instantly and the hares from that time forward lived comfortably.*

XIII

THE THIEF OUTWITTED

AS a boy was sitting on the brink of a well crying bitterly, a thief came there and asked him why he was crying. He answered that as he was playing, he looked into the well, when the pearl necklace that was on his neck slipped off and fell into the water. If he should go home without the necklace, his parents would thrash him, and on that account he was crying. The thief, hoping he would be able to find it, said to him — "My lad be not afraid, I will go down into the well and get the pearl necklace, do you take care of my clothes?" Having left his clothes on the bank, he jumped into the well. As soon as he had gone down to the bottom, the boy took his clothes and ran away with them. The thief searched for a long time, and not finding the necklace, came up again, but when he could not see the boy anywhere, he exclaimed — "Even I, who am a thief, have been deceived by a boy."

* "Sasanka" in Sanskrit. The moon (*lit* marked with spots resembling the form of a hare)

XIV

KING SIBI

BY far the best of monarchs that wielded sway over the Nishada country was King Sibi, who was the type of all virtues, a well-wisher of his subjects. He would even forego his life to protect the refugee. One day, the Gandarvas began praising his virtuous qualities at the Court of their King Devendra, who heard them and coming to a resolve to put him to test, assumed the form of a hawk and called upon his friend Agni to take the form of a dove. The hawk, then pursuing the dove, reached the earth. The dove came to King Sibi and said — "O King! there comes a hawk to put an end to my life and make me its prey. Shield me" So saying, he took refuge under the king. Not long after, the hawk approached the king and said — "It is unfair of you to protect my quarry, for that will lead to my death by starvation. Refrain, therefore, from protecting the dove" To which the king replied that he would give the dove's weight of flesh from his body instead of the dove itself. The hawk consented to the proposal. The king, thereupon, brought a balance, put the dove on one pan and his flesh on the other, but seeing that even a great part of the flesh of his body did not equally balance the dove's, the king himself sat in one of the pans, when the weights were found to be equal. Whereupon, the hawk and the dove thought very highly of the king, and assuming their own forms, stood before the king, conferred boons on him and went to their respective worlds.

XV

A WISE COUNSEL

IN Bengal, there was a king who built a huge fort and lived in it with a very large retinue, and was invincible so long as he remained in the fort

Now, a Polygar, a tributary king, conceived the idea of somehow drawing the king out of his fort, confining him in prison and occupying his vast dominions. With this object, he went to the king one day and informed him that on the morrow, his son's marriage was to be celebrated and invited the king to be present on the auspicious occasion. The king consented, but his minister, who heard the news, approached him and said — "You have entertained, I hear, thoughts of going to the Polygar's house. He is a man full of tricks, and has large forces. I am sure he will do you some mischief, once you are out of the fort. Do not go to the Polygar."

To which the king replied — "What care we how full of tricks he is? He has been faithful to us long and, judging him from his antecedents, he will not, we think, do us any harm. If he entertained such thoughts, why did he not invade our dominions while we remained in the fort?"

The minister replied — "You are invincible so long as you remain in the fort and he dare not do you any harm. He, therefore, seeks your friendship. But if you once go out of the fort, you are helpless. He will not suffer the favorable opportunity to pass away. He will show you then his spite. To give you an example, the lotus, so long as it remains in water, spreads forth its petals despite the heat of the sun."

the sun all the while aiding it. But once it comes out of its proper element (water), the very same sun makes it wither away. It is the same with the Polygar and yourself."

The king was exceedingly pleased with these words and refrained from going to the Polygar.

XVI

INGRATITUDE

THERE was a tiger in a certain wood who used to kill and devour all the beasts that inhabited it. One day, he caught a wild buffalo, and while eating it, one of its bones stuck in his jaws. The jaws became inflamed and the tiger had to endure great pain. He laid himself down under a tree, and, in great suffering, opened his mouth and exclaimed thus — "How shall I extract this? How shall I live? What shall I do?" In this distress he saw a crow upon the tree and said to him — "O crow, you see my suffering, if you will but extract the bone and rid me of my pain, I will give you as much as you want from the food I procure every day." The crow was moved by this supplication, and taking compassion on him, thrust his beak into the mouth of the tiger and took out the bone. Later on, when he asked the tiger for the flesh he had promised, the tiger replied — "When you put your beak into my mouth, I did not crush you under my jaws, but allowed you to come out uninjured. Ungrateful indeed are you because you ask me for flesh? Look to your business."

Thus people in prosperity often forget their friends who have served them in adversity.

XVII

THE TALISMAN

AT Chatrapur lived four poor friends, who, being in great distress and sorely puzzled how to eke out a livelihood, met at a certain spot to devise some means for bettering their condition. They thereupon performed severe austerities to the Goddess Kali who, being pleased with them, appeared to them and asked them what they wanted. They begged her to confer riches and happiness on them. The Goddess thereupon gave each of them a talisman which was to be carried on the head. They were told to go in a northerly direction, and wherever the talisman fell from the head, to dig there and take whatever came to each person's lot. The four friends set out on their journey northward and went a certain distance, when the talisman of the first person fell from his head. When he dug there, an enormous quantity of copper was found. The first man told the others that he was quite content with his lot and he carried the copper home. After travelling some more distance, they found that the talisman fell from the head of another of them. On digging, he saw an enormous quantity of silver. He followed the example of the first and desisted from going any farther. The other two travelled for some time longer, when the talisman on the head of one of them fell down. When he dug there, an enormous quantity of gold was found. He, thereupon, told his friend not to proceed any further, as with the quantity of gold found there, both of them could live happily. But his friend gave a deaf ear to his words and went on for some time longer, till the talisman fell from his head. A quantity of iron was found in the place when he dug there. He was overcome with grief

at his lot and regretting he did not accept his friend's offer, he retraced his steps. But, alas, he was not able to find him. Thereupon, immersed in grief, he cried to get at the iron that had fallen to his lot, but when he went there, he was not able to find that also. Feeling very sore at heart, he came back to the town and lived there by begging.

XVIII

CASTLE BUILDING

AT Tirupati lived a Brahman in poor circumstances who received on a certain day a pot of flour as a present from a merchant.¹ He took it, and being very tired, seated himself on the verandah of a house, and soliloquized thus: "If I sell this pot of flour, I shall get half a-rupee for it, with which I can purchase a kid. This, in short time, will produce a flock, I will then sell them and buy cows and buffaloes, and thus, in a few years, I shall be the master of three thousand heads of cattle. I will then purchase a mansion, which I will furnish elegantly, and marry a beautiful damsel who will crown my happiness by giving birth to a son. My wife will allow the baby to cry, but I shall give her a kick." Thus thinking, he thrust out his leg like one really going to kick struck the pot and broke it to pieces. The flour got mixed with dirt and all his ideas of happiness vanished.

XIX

THE CRANE AND THE SWAN

IN days long gone by, there lived on the banks of the river Krishna, a crane on a silk-cotton tree. Once upon a time, it beckoned to a swan passing by, and said — "Your body resembles mine in colour, but your beak and legs are red. I have not come across a bird of your kind till now. Who are you? What is your errand?"

Whereupon, the swan gave the following answer — "I am a swan, I am an inhabitant of the heavenly lake called Manasasaras. I am coming thence."

The crane then asked what things were procurable there and what formed the chief article of its food. To which the swan replied — "All the things there are made by angelic hands, and it is beyond my power to describe the grandeur of the place, but you may hear some of the important things procurable. In and around the region are found golden earth, ambrosia, golden lotuses, heaps of pearls, clouds of perfumes and the tree of paradise. Every object thereof is a wonder."

When the swan informed the crane further that it partook of the buds of golden lotuses, the latter impatiently asked the former if any oysters were procurable there. On receiving a reply in the negative, the latter burst into a fit of laughter and said — "Why prattle of the excellences of a place void of oysters? It is a pity you do not know how palatable the oysters are."

XX

DUPED BY THIEVES

THERE was a Brahman, Vasanthayaji by name, at Srirampur, on the banks of the Tamraparni. He conceived the idea of performing a yajna (sacrifice), and wanted four or five of the best goats for the purpose. He went, therefore, to a neighbouring village, purchased the goats, and was wending his way home, when four thieves in confederacy wanted to appropriate the goats to themselves. One of them, therefore, came and stood before the Brahman and said "Why are you carrying a number of mad dogs?" The Brahman merely thought him a fool who confounded goats with mad dogs. He went on a little farther, when another of the thieves put him the same question and wanted him to take care lest the mad dogs should bite him. The Brahman, on hearing these words, entertained a slight doubt in his mind. When he had gone some more yards, the third thief came close by the goats, and began to rebuke the Brahman for letting loose a number of mad dogs on the wayfarers. The Brahman, on hearing this, became certain that they must be mad dogs and tried to unloose them, when the last of the thieves came up and wanted him to tie them up to a tree adjacent, as by letting them loose, he would make them fall upon people and bite them. The Brahman thereupon tied them to a tree and ran away. The thieves then untied them and took them home.

XXI

VANITY OF HUMAN WISHES

KING Jayachandra had two favourites, one a Mussalman and the other a Brahman, to whom he was constantly giving presents, by means of which they grew rich and lived happily. One day, the king asked them to whom they owed their happiness. The Mussalman immediately replied that he was indebted solely to his sovereign, but the Brahman declared that he owed everything to the grace of the Almighty. The king wishing to put their assertions to the test, filled a pumpkin with pearls, which he delivered to the Mussalman, and at the same time presented the Brahman with two pieces of silver. On their way home, the former, not knowing the contents of the pumpkin, began to grumble at the king's present, and told the latter that he would sell it to him for his two silver-pieces, to which the Brahman consented. When he broke it and found the immense wealth that it contained, he returned to the king in great joy and related his adventure. The king's vanity was completely cured by this occurrence. Unassisted by the hand of Providence, human endeavours are fruitless.

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